



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



FRIDAY — 19 Nov 2021

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HEADLINE	11/19 China threatens Lithuania: Taiwan office
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-threatens-lithuania-taiwan-office-opening-81272670

GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China on Friday threatened to retaliate against Lithuania after the Baltic nation allowed Taiwan to open a representative office in its capital, Vilnius.</p> <p>Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Lithuania would “reap what it sows,” but gave no details.</p> <p>Zhao described Lithuania's move as an “egregious act” that “grossly interferes” in China’s internal affairs.</p> <p>The office, which opened Thursday, bears the name Taiwan rather than “Chinese Taipei,” which is used by the International Olympic Committee and many foreign nations to avoid offending China, which claims the self-governing island democracy as its own territory.</p> <p>Taiwan has just 15 formal diplomatic allies, but maintains informal ties with all major nations through trade offices that act as de facto embassies, including in the United States and Japan.</p> <p>It wasn't clear what actions China plans to take in response to the opening of the office. Beijing has already recalled its ambassador from Vilnius and expelled the Lithuanian ambassador.</p> <p>Lithuania plans to open a representative office in Taipei by the end of the year and has withdrawn from the “17 plus one” arrangement launched by China to bind it closer to countries in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>China's threat underscores its extreme sensitivity to any challenge to what it considers its “core interests,” as it presses ahead with its increasingly assertive foreign policy.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Russia: 3rd straight day record deaths
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/russia-reports-record-covid-deaths-3rd-straight-day-81272669
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- Russian authorities on Friday reported a record number of coronavirus deaths for the third day in a row.</p> <p>Russia’s state coronavirus task force reported 1,254 virus deaths, up 1,251 on Thursday and 1,247 on Wednesday.</p> <p>The task force also reported 37,156 new confirmed cases. The daily new infections in recent weeks appear to have taken a downward trend but still remain higher than during previous surges of the virus.</p> <p>The latest surge in infections and deaths comes amid low vaccination rates and lax public attitudes toward taking precautions. Fewer than 40% of Russia’s nearly 146 million people have been fully vaccinated, even though the country approved a domestically developed COVID-19 vaccine months before most of the world.</p> <p>In total, the coronavirus task force has reported over 9.2 million confirmed infections and more than 261,000 COVID-19 deaths, by far the highest death toll in Europe.</p> <p>Some experts believe the true figure is even higher. Reports by Russia’s statistical service, Rosstat, that tally coronavirus-linked deaths retroactively reveal much higher mortality. They say 462,000 people with COVID-19 died between April 2020 and September of this year.</p> <p>Russian officials have said the task force only includes deaths for which COVID-19 was the main cause, and uses data from medical facilities. Rosstat uses wider criteria for counting virus-related deaths and takes its numbers from civil registry offices where registering a death is finalized.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Official: Germany is one big outbreak
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/disease-control-chief-germany-big-outbreak-81272803

GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Germany has entered a “nationwide state of emergency” because of surging coronavirus infections, the head of the country's disease control agency said Friday.</p> <p>Lothar Wieler, the head of the Robert Koch Institute, said regular medical care cannot be guaranteed anymore in some parts of the country because hospitals and intensive care wards are overstretched.</p> <p>The German air force confirmed a report by daily Bild that it was preparing to help transfer patients to clinics with free beds.</p> <p>“All of Germany is one big outbreak,” Wieler told reporters in Berlin. “This is a nationwide state of emergency. We need to pull the emergency brake.”</p> <p>He called for urgent additional measures to tackle the rise in COVID-19 cases, which topped 50,000 for the third day running. The Robert Koch Institute also reported 201 further deaths, taking the toll to 98,739 since the start of the outbreak.</p> <p>Wieler's comments came as the upper house of parliament on Friday approved new measures to control the outbreak proposed by the center-left alliance that emerged after the Sept. 26 national election. The measures include requirements for people to prove they are vaccinated, recently recovered from COVID-19 or have tested negative for the virus in order to access communal workplaces or public transport.</p> <p>Separately, outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed with the governors of Germany's 16 states to introduce a new threshold linked to the number of hospital admissions of COVID-19 patients per 100,000 people over a seven-day period. Some states are also considering mandatory vaccinations for some professional groups such as medical staff and nursing home employees.</p> <p>Neighboring Austria, which has also been hit by a surge in new cases, announced it would extend a nationwide lockdown to vaccinated people from Monday, and introduce compulsory vaccinations from February.</p> <p>Such measures are not currently being discussed in Germany, where the outgoing Merkel government and the three-party alliance hoping to replace it are at odds over how to respond to the pandemic.</p> <p>Germany's current health minister, Jens Spahn, called Friday for a “national common effort” to respond to the rising case numbers.</p> <p>“In the short term we won't manage to break the wave (of infections) with vaccinations and booster shots alone,” he said at a joint news conference with Wieler, who called on Germans to help limit the spread of the virus by reducing their social contacts.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 FDA authorizes booster shots all adults
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/us/politics/coronavirus-boosters-fda.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration on Friday authorized booster shots of both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for everyone 18 and older, opening up eligibility to tens of millions more fully vaccinated adults.</p> <p>Moderna and Pfizer both announced that regulators had broadened the authorization for their booster shots.</p> <p>The move simplifies eligibility, fulfills a pledge by President Biden to offer the shots to every American adult and formally allows a practice already in place in at least 10 states. Fearful that waning protection and the onset of winter will set off a wave of breakthrough infections, a growing number of governors had already offered boosters to everyone 18 and older ahead of the holidays.</p>

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the federal government's top infectious disease expert, has argued relentlessly over the past month for booster shots for all adults, a position shared by most of Mr. Biden's other health advisers. Dr. Fauci has said that a dip in antibody levels in fully vaccinated people was a clear sign that booster shots were needed. Public health experts who argue that healthy younger adults do not need them, he has said, are ignoring the risks of symptomatic Covid-19.

"Enough is enough. Let's get moving on here," [he said at an event Wednesday night](#). "We know what the data are."

If the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention agrees, all adults who received a second shot of either Pfizer or Moderna at least six months ago will likely be eligible for a booster shot by the weekend. A meeting of the agency's outside advisers is scheduled for Friday.

At a White House briefing on Wednesday, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the C.D.C. director, promised that the agency would "quickly review the safety and effectiveness data and make recommendations as soon as we hear from F.D.A."

The F.D.A.'s action came after months of fierce debate within the administration and the scientific community about who needed booster shots, and when. Some outside advisers to the F.D.A. and C.D.C. repeatedly expressed [discomfort](#) with how quickly the administration was moving to offer the shots. Critics said the administration's booster campaign was motivated by practical or political reasons more than scientific ones, and that federal regulators were analyzing safety and efficacy data on the fly.

"The evidence isn't there that a large rollout of boosters is really going to have that much impact on the epidemic," said Ira M. Longini Jr., a vaccine expert and professor of biostatistics at the University of Florida. He said that booster doses could increase someone's protection at least temporarily, but would do little to halt transmission of the virus, which is being driven by the unvaccinated. For a jittery public, he said, booster shots might feel like a quick and easy way to hold the virus at bay. But he repeated the administration's own oft-stated position that convincing the unvaccinated to get the shots must remain the top priority.

Other public health experts have argued that the government needed to offer boosters to all adults to eliminate confusion. Complex eligibility rules coupled with the government's recent decision to let people choose among all three vaccines for their booster has left the public somewhat befuddled, they say.

"This decision by F.D.A. is overdue," said Dr. Elizabeth McNally, director of the Center for Genetic Medicine at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

"Many people had trouble understanding whether they should or shouldn't get boosters," she said in a statement. "This message is much clearer — get a booster!"

Until now, those eligible for boosters included people 65 and older, residents of long-term care facilities, people with underlying medical conditions, and those whose jobs or institutional living conditions heightened their risk.

All recipients of Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine have already been cleared to get a booster shot at least two months after their injection.

Jason L. Schwartz, an associate professor of health policy at the Yale School of Public Health, said the latest authorizations were "a recognition that the current approach to booster recommendations just isn't working."

"It's so confusing that I think the public has sort of shrugged at the importance of boosters," he said. "And the groups for whom it's really important to get boosters — the older individuals, the long-term care residents, folks with medical conditions — aren't getting boosters at the rates they should. It's time for a reset."

The booster rollout is expanding even as public health experts continue to argue over whether young, healthy adults need added protection. The argument is stronger for recipients of Pfizer's vaccine than for recipients of Moderna's, which has proved significantly more potent.

While some studies have found that the Pfizer vaccine's effectiveness against infection and hospitalization drops about four months after the second dose, Moderna's effectiveness has remained steadier.

At the same time, regulators have been concerned by data from Nordic countries and elsewhere suggesting that young male Moderna recipients may face heightened risks of myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle — a side effect has also been tied to the Pfizer vaccine. Scientists [have said](#) the absolute risk still remains very small, most cases are mild and resolve quickly and that Covid-19 can also trigger myocarditis.

Concerns about myocarditis are behind the F.D.A.'s decision to wait to authorize the vaccine for adolescents.

At the heart of the booster debate is the question of what vaccines are supposed to do. Critics of the administration's policy argue that despite some degree of waning protection, the vaccines are still fulfilling their mission of protecting against severe disease and hospitalization.

Booster advocates like Dr. Fauci counter that the vaccines should also protect against symptomatic disease, especially since some patients avoid hospitalization but suffer long-term consequences.

"I don't know of any other vaccine that we only worry about keeping people out of the hospitals," Dr. Fauci said at a White House briefing Wednesday. "I think an important thing is to prevent people from getting symptomatic disease," including younger people.

In recent weeks, state after state has moved to allow booster shots for all adults, including [Massachusetts](#), [Rhode Island](#), [Kansas](#), [Kentucky](#), [Maine](#), [Vermont](#), [Arkansas](#), [California](#), [Colorado](#) and [New Mexico](#).

A host of other countries have taken the same approach, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Norway and Saudi Arabia. Regulators for the European Union have authorized booster doses of both [Moderna](#) and [Pfizer-BioNTech](#) for all adults.

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HEADLINE	11/18 CDC: backyard poultry salmonella outbreak
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/nation-world/salmonella-outbreak-backyard-poultry/507-e1a0aaf3-1569-44ae-bbfb-9a5d8945f17e
GIST	<p>A nationwide salmonella outbreak linked to backyard poultry that started nearly a year ago has now sickened more than 1,100 people and resulted in two deaths. The outbreak spread to nearly every state.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Thursday that its investigation into the outbreak is over, but warned that any backyard poultry can still carry salmonella, which can lead to illness.</p> <p>Hundreds of people who got sick and were interviewed by health officials said they had been in contact with or had purchased some backyard poultry in the days before they got sick. Although illnesses began in December 2020, the CDC had not officially announced the connection to backyard poultry until May 20.</p> <p>A total of 1,135 illnesses in 48 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were reported during the outbreak, but the CDC said the number is likely higher since some people may have not reported getting sick. At least 273 people were hospitalized. The two people who died were from Indiana and West Virginia.</p>

The only states that didn't report an illness in this outbreak were Alaska and Delaware. The states with the most cases were Wisconsin with 73 followed by Minnesota (56), Ohio (55), New York (47).

Six different subgroups of salmonella were detected in the outbreak

- Enteritidis
- Hadar
- Indiana
- Infantis
- Mbandaka
- Muenchen

Most people infected with salmonella experience diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps, according to the CDC. Symptoms usually form within six hours of swallowing the bacteria and most people recover in 4-7 days without treatment.

Children under age 5, adults 65 and older and people with weakened immune systems may experience more severe illness that may lead to hospitalization.

Here is a list of all the states that have reported illnesses linked to this outbreak. The number represents how many people got sick in each state.

- Alabama (14)
- Arizona (17)
- Arkansas (12)
- California (43)
- Colorado (13)
- Connecticut (21)
- Florida (11)
- Georgia (44)
- Hawaii (1)
- Idaho (12)
- Illinois (22)
- Indiana (23)
- Iowa (32)
- Kansas (19)
- Kentucky (37)
- Louisiana (8)
- Maine (18)
- Maryland (20)
- Massachusetts (25)
- Michigan (32)
- Minnesota (56)
- Mississippi (25)
- Missouri (41)
- Montana (14)
- Nebraska (16)
- Nevada (4)
- New Hampshire (19)
- New Jersey (19)
- New Mexico (4)
- New York (47)
- North Carolina (43)
- North Dakota (8)
- Ohio (55)
- Oklahoma (7)
- Oregon (8)
- Pennsylvania (38)
- Puerto Rico (1)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhode Island (4) • South Carolina (28) • South Dakota (10) • Tennessee (44) • Texas (22) • Utah (12) • Vermont (11) • Virginia (43) • Washington (35) • Washington, D.C. (1) • West Virginia (19) • Wisconsin (73) • Wyoming (4)
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HEADLINE	11/18 Floods hit Whatcom Co. dairy farmers hard
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/severe-weather/whatcom-county-dairy-farmers-hit-hard-by-extensive-flooding/281-def482e6-ba1d-4031-913f-cd9328206186
GIST	<p>EVERSON, Wash. — The threat of flooding may be over in Whatcom County, but many farmers are still dealing with the impact of this week's historic weather.</p> <p>Hans Wolfisberg is the owner of Edelweiss Dairy, a small organic producer that mostly serves customers in Washington state.</p> <p>“That was far and beyond anything, ever,” Wolfisberg said.</p> <p>This week, his focus wasn't producing milk. He fought to keep the cattle above water – literally. A foot of water came into the barn Tuesday, when the neighboring Nooksack River flooded.</p> <p>Everyone is okay, but the pain is still very real.</p> <p>“My heart goes out to other dairymen and people that are losing a lot of what they worked so hard for,” he said.</p> <p>Early this week, much of Lynden was underwater. Farmers' fields flooded and more than 100 residents were evacuated from their homes.</p> <p>The major flood concern has come and gone. But in parts of the county, there is still plenty of standing water -- an issue that will take days, if not weeks, to resolve.</p> <p>Days later, some roadways are still impassable and many fields are still underwater. The extent of the damage may not be known until all the water subsides.</p> <p>“I think dairy will be taking the brunt of this. Certainly, it was a challenge dealing with it and they will continue to deal with struggles related to this for some time,” said Dillion Honcoop of the nonprofit Whatcom Family Farmers.</p> <p>Wolfisberg and his dairy are out time and money, but he said they will be back to full production soon. They are safe, but exhausted.</p> <p>“I’m more tired from the stress than from the workload,” Wolfisberg said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Sumas: first the floodwaters, now recovery
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SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/just-start-over-rebuild-first-floodwaters-now-recovery-sumas/HNSUWWUEZEDVHOBXPX2XFVV5A/
GIST	<p>SUMAS, Wash. — On Thursday, Sumas families spent the day gutting their waterlogged homes.</p> <p>“It was like walking in a nightmare,” said Austin Holder, who had to take a boat to get to his home on Monday.</p> <p>By Thursday, his family had helped him clear everything out and strip the drywall.</p> <p>“Just start over. Rebuild,” the 23-year-old said, when asked what his plan was moving forward.</p> <p>Holder bought the two-bedroom house several years ago when his daughter was born.</p> <p>He said they will now stay with their family until they can move back in.</p> <p>“Hopefully we can get some money together and make it a home again for me and my daughter,” said Holder, in an interview on Thursday evening.</p> <p>Holder’s sister started a GoFundMe page to help with flood relief for Austin and his daughter.</p> <p>Located roughly 30 miles from the Canadian border, the small Washington town was engulfed by floodwaters on Sunday and Monday.</p> <p>Officials said roughly 75% of houses in Sumas suffered flood damage.</p> <p>Many streets and houses were still underwater on Thursday.</p> <p>Governor Jay Inslee on Thursday suggested federal relief dollars were not guaranteed.</p> <p>“You cannot be assured of this because in part the federal rules are very amorphous. They are subject to substantial discretion by the administration. The rules aren’t entirely clear from a numerical standpoint,” Inslee said.</p> <p>On Thursday, WSDOT reported that six main roads were still closed due to floodwaters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SR 547 at Bishop Road to Telegraph Road. • SR 20 at Collins Road to Mary Lane. • SR 9 MP 84-SR 542 Nugents Corner. • SR 9 Hathaway to Whatcom County. • SR 9 Vancouver Street to the Canadian border. • I-5 NB Ramp at Iowa Street. <p>Volunteer crews told KIRO 7 they will be in Sumas through the weekend to help clear out the houses of those who need assistance.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 France warns Iran over ‘sham’ nuke stance
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-calls-depolitisation-iaea-after-france-urges-it-act-2021-11-19/
GIST	<p>PARIS, Nov 19 (Reuters) - France's foreign minister warned Iran on Friday not to come to the next round of talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal with a "sham" negotiating stance, a day after Paris urged the board of the U.N. atomic watchdog to send Iran a tough message.</p> <p>Tehran had earlier responded to Paris by saying the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which verifies Tehran's compliance with the 2015 deal with world powers limiting Tehran's nuclear programme, must be "free of any political conduct</p>

The statements highlighted rising tension before the United States, Iran and world powers resume indirect negotiations on reviving the deal on Nov. 29, five days after a meeting of the IAEA's Board of Governors.

Western diplomats say time is running low to resurrect the pact, which then-U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned in 2018, angering Iran and dismaying the other world powers involved - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia.

Six rounds of indirect talks were held between April and June. The negotiations were interrupted after the election of a new Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, who has said Iran will not back down in the talks.

Paris warned Tehran over what U.S. and European diplomats view as unrealistic demands, including a call for all U.S. and EU sanctions imposed since 2017 to be dropped.

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told Le Monde newspaper Paris wanted first to establish whether talks would resume where they ended in June.

"If this discussion is a sham, then we will have to consider the JCPoA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) empty," he said, referring to the 2015 deal.

"The United States is ready to return to the negotiations where they left off in June, so that they can be concluded quickly. We will assess from the 29th and in the following days whether this is also the Iranian will."

France said on Thursday a strong message should be sent to Iran over its nuclear activities and a lack of cooperation.

Diplomats say it is unlikely Western powers will take tough action such as pushing an IAEA board resolution rebuking Iran for fear of jeopardising the Nov. 29 talks.

Tehran said on Friday the IAEA must not be politicised.

"As a responsible member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran has always emphasised that the IAEA's reputation as a technical and specialised body of the United Nations must be free of any political conduct," Iran's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran limited its nuclear programme in exchange for relief from sanctions. Trump's 2018 decision to reimpose U.S. sanctions prompted Tehran to begin breaching its nuclear restrictions.

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HEADLINE	11/19 Thanksgiving dinner cost jumps; 14% avg.
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/us-thanksgiving-dinner-cost-jumps-with-inflation-menu-though-deals-remain-2021-11-19/
GIST	<p>CHICAGO, Nov 19 (Reuters) - Thanksgiving dinner will cost U.S. consumers an average of 14% more this year in the biggest annual increase in 31 years, the American Farm Bureau Federation said, though shoppers can still find deals in grocery stores.</p> <p>Rising food and gas prices are squeezing U.S. consumers as the pandemic snarls global supply chains and the economic drag from the summer wave of COVID-19 infections fades.</p> <p>The Farm Bureau, which represents U.S. farmers and the broader agriculture industry, pointed to inflation and supply-chain disruptions for lifting the average cost of a Thanksgiving dinner for 10 people to \$53.31 from a 10-year-low \$46.90 in 2020. The cost is based on Farm Bureau shoppers who checked prices for turkey, cranberries, dinner rolls and other staples in stores from Oct. 26 to Nov. 8.</p>

"The cranberry sauce, the stuffing, all those things that are traditional, have gone up," said Sherry Hooker, a 69-year-old retiree shopping at Jewel-Osco store in Chicago on Thursday.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to predict consumer demand, which adds to high prices, the Farm Bureau said. Average prices for turkey, the centerpiece of many Thanksgiving dinners, are up 24% from 2020 at about \$1.50 per pound, Farm Bureau said.

Without turkey, the price for the overall meal is up 6.6%. That is in line with the 6.2% increase in the U.S. Consumer Price Index in October, when the index saw its biggest annual rise since November 1990, although it is a bit above the 5.4% year-over-year increase for the Labor Department's measure of costs for food consumed at home.

Adjusted for inflation, Thanksgiving costs are up for the first time since 2015 and 7% higher than last year, Farm Bureau data show.

In Chicago, Cinda Shaver, 62, said she now spends at least \$120 a week shopping for two people at discount supermarket Aldi, up from \$90 previously for the same items.

Cooks can still find deals as the holiday approaches, though.

Visits by Reuters to two grocery stores on Thursday showed prices vary widely. The same basket of items the Farm Bureau checked cost just \$40.01 at a Big Y store in Newtown, Connecticut, including frozen turkey for 99 cents a pound.

At Jewel-Osco in Chicago, generic brand frozen turkeys were on sale for as little as 49 cents a pound.

Farm Bureau said its shoppers checked prices about two weeks before most supermarket chains began featuring whole frozen turkeys at lower prices. The average per-pound sale price for whole frozen turkeys was \$1.07 from Nov. 5-11 and dropped 18% to 88 cents from Nov. 12-18, Farm Bureau said.

"The good news is that the top turkey producers in the country are confident that everyone who wants a bird for their Thanksgiving dinner will be able to get one, and a large one will only cost \$1 more than last year," U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a statement.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that prices for Thanksgiving staples are up about 5% from last year, based on government data. It tracked prices of a 12-pound turkey, sweet potatoes, russet potatoes, cranberries and a gallon of milk.

Hooker, for one, will not cut back on her Thanksgiving feast because of high prices. Instead, she said she will "bite the bullet and have tradition."

"It's once a year," she said.

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HEADLINE	11/19 CDC: there will be a flu season this year
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/11/19/health/flu-season-starting-wellness/index.html
GIST	(CNN)Flu season may be getting under way, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says. While influenza activity is very low in the United States, it's getting started and there's enough to indicate that there will be at least some kind of flu season this year, unlike last year, when an emphasis on frequent handwashing, mask use, closures of schools and businesses, and social distancing pretty much shut down transmission of the virus.

It's always impossible to predict what a flu season will look like, but Lynnette Brammer, lead of the CDC's Domestic Influenza Surveillance team, said reports of more flu cases have caught her team's attention and have her thinking flu season may have returned after its one-year break.

"Overall flu activity is still really low. It's starting to creep up just a little bit," Brammer told CNN.

"That gives us the idea that flu season may be starting."

The CDC estimates that, depending on the season, flu kills anywhere from 12,000 to 61,000 people a year in the United States. During the first week of November, 14% of deaths were attributable to [influenza, pneumonia or Covid-19](#). Only 0.3% of specimens tested came back positive for influenza this past week, the CDC found, and just 295 people have been hospitalized for flu.

On Monday, the CDC confirmed it was helping state and local health officials in Michigan investigate an outbreak of more than 500 cases among students at the University of Michigan. That's the biggest single outbreak so far.

Brammer said what influenza cases there are seem to be among younger people ages 5 to 24.

"A lot of times, flu can happen first in younger age groups and then spread to the very young and the older age groups. It doesn't always happen that way," she said. "Every flu season is different."

Influenza is complicated because several different types and strains circulate. Right now, Brammer said, a strain known as H3N2, which has been around for decades, is what's infecting people. Flu vaccines also protect against a strain known as H1N1, which appeared and caused a mild pandemic in 2009, as well as two influenza B strains.

The CDC recommends that just about everybody six months and older should get a flu vaccine every year. That's because the virus mutates and the formulation often gets tweaked, but also because people's immunity wanes from year to year, even with vaccination.

Brammer said vaccine manufacturers are projecting they'll make 200 million doses of flu vaccine this year -- the biggest supply ever. That's not enough to cover the whole US population, but historically, only about half the people who should get vaccinated against flu actually do so.

"It was best to get vaccine in October. but a lot of people just didn't get around to it," Brammer said. "If you haven't been vaccinated yet, you better get around to it now."

Many Americans are also being advised to get booster doses of Covid-19 vaccines and it's safe and convenient to get them together, Brammer said. "This is the perfect time to go and get vaccinated if you haven't already done it," she said.

The CDC is worried because flu vaccination appears to have fallen behind schedule.

[Flu vaccination rates](#) for children are 6 percentage points lower this year than last year, with 34% of children having received their flu vaccine so far, compared to 40% this time a year ago. It's 10 points lower for Black children -- 24.9% compared to 35.3% last year.

Pregnant women, who are strongly advised to get flu shots both to protect themselves and their babies, are also falling behind. Only 41% of pregnant women are vaccinated so far, compared to 58% this time last year, the CDC says. And just 21.5% of Black pregnant women are vaccinated.

The CDC says, however, that overall more people say they plan to get vaccinated against influenza this year than last year. It says 58.5% of people surveyed say they plan to get a flu shot, compared to 54.8% who got one last year.

	<p>The CDC found that 70.6% of adults who are vaccinated against coronavirus or definitely plan to get a Covid-19 vaccine have received or intend to receive a flu vaccine for the 2021-22 season.</p> <p>And just 11% of adults who say they probably or definitely will not get a coronavirus vaccine say they'll get a flu vaccine.</p> <p>So far, the CDC says, 162.5 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed. Vaccine manufacturers are continuing to make and distribute flu vaccine.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Gov. won't order stricter mandates
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/gov-jay-inslee-says-he-wont-add-stricter-regulations-to-joe-bidens-covid-vaccine-mandate/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee announced Thursday that he won't pursue additional sweeping mandates to strengthen a federal COVID-19 vaccine mandate for workers at large employers.</p> <p>President Joe Biden has ordered that companies with 100 or more workers require COVID shots starting in January. Instead of getting vaccinated, those workers could be tested weekly.</p> <p>A federal appeals court temporarily blocked the Biden rule earlier this month amid legal challenges by some states, as well as businesses, advocacy organizations and religious groups.</p> <p>It remains to be seen whether courts will allow the Biden vaccine rule — which is scheduled to kick in Jan. 4 — to go into effect.</p> <p>Inslee had been considering additional state orders to make the Biden mandate stricter. One example would be removing the testing option, meaning workers would have to get vaccinated. Another consideration was to open the requirement to smaller businesses.</p> <p>Groups like the Association of Washington Business have spoken out against those stricter measures, out of fear they might disrupt the labor force or put undue costs on businesses.</p> <p>The governor's announcement Thursday in a news conference signaled those possible additions to any federal mandate would not be pursued. The governor, who in August issued possibly the strictest vaccine mandate in the nation, requiring state employees and most health care workers to be vaccinated by Oct. 18, added that he hopes the courts allow the federal mandate to move forward.</p> <p>"I believe the standard is the right direction for the nation, but obviously we have to wait for a judicial decision," said Inslee.</p> <p>Inslee's remarks come as confirmed coronavirus cases and hospitalizations continued to gradually decrease in Washington.</p> <p>State health officials, however, are nervous that gatherings for the coming holiday season could spark a new surge in the virus. That dynamic played out this time last year, although there were no authorized vaccines at the time.</p> <p>During the news conference, state Health Secretary Umair Shah said occupancy rates at intensive-care units in Washington hospitals remain just below 90%.</p> <p>The state is still coming down from its pandemic peak of a couple months ago, said Shah, and the decrease in cases is beginning to slow.</p> <p>"I would still caution people from large gatherings ... but the real concern I have is really around travel," said Shah.</p>

	He advised people traveling to “be very cautious when it comes to in transit, wearing masks, make sure they get vaccinated in advance.”
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HEADLINE	11/18 Russia’s West anti-vax campaign backfires?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211118-russian-antivaccine-disinformation-campaign-backfires
GIST	<p>For more than a year, Russian-aligned troll factories overseeing thousands of social media accounts have been accused by Western countries and disinformation experts of spreading anti-vaccine messages in an aggressive campaign to spread conspiracy theories and cast doubt on Western coronavirus vaccines.</p> <p>But the year-long offensive appears to have backfired.</p> <p>Russian officials now worry that the anti-vaccine skepticism encouraged by the troll factories has spilled over and is partly responsible for the high level of vaccine hesitancy among Russians. Only 35% of the country’s population is fully vaccinated, despite the wide availability of the country’s home-grown Sputnik vaccine. Despite surging cases the uptake remains sluggish.</p> <p>Social network analysis company Graphika reported last month how Russia-aligned troll factories have recently been focusing on mandatory vaccination campaigns in the West seeking to undermine the effort to cajole more people to get jabbed. The U.S. Department of State last year started to warn that Russia-based propagandists were using social media platforms to spread conspiracy theories and to promote doubts around vaccinations.</p> <p>But anti-vaccination videos and postings on the Internet are attracting high traffic in Russia, too, with tens of thousands of views. Mistrust of vaccines is pervasive in Russia. A survey conducted earlier this month by the Levada Center, a leading pollster, found 45% of Russians are not prepared to get inoculated. And the pollster found 50% are not afraid of contracting the virus, although it did find the fear of contracting the virus increased from 43% in August to 48% now.</p> <p>Infections Rising</p> <p>Russian health authorities have been reporting recently around 40,000 new coronavirus cases a day, despite a partial week-long shutdown earlier this month that required Russians to take paid leave in a bid to curb the spread of the virus. Russia’s low vaccination rate is especially dismaying considering that the country became the first in the world to register a COVID-19 vaccine with Russian health authorities approving Sputnik V, which was named for the satellite from half a century ago, in August last year.</p> <p>While neighboring countries have sometimes scrambled to meet vaccine demand, especially earlier this year, Russia has been confronted with quite the opposite dilemma: plenty of vaccine supplies but resistance from a vaccine-skeptical population.</p> <p>In the last few weeks, the number of recorded COVID-19 cases has risen inexorably, with records broken day after day. By ordering most state organizations and private businesses to stop work for a week, except for those involved in maintaining critical infrastructure, the Kremlin hoped the trend could be reversed. But since the involuntary public holiday ended there has been little let-up in the infection rates.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov admitted Wednesday to reporters in Moscow that the authorities had expected the pandemic to end quickly. “At first we thought that the pandemic would end in six months — in a year. Now we see that we were wrong in our calculations. We will soon have two years of this pandemic, and so far, there is no end in sight,” he said.</p> <p>The Kremlin is planning to launch a new domestic information campaign which will stress that life can only return to normal, and pandemic restrictions lifted, when more Russians are inoculated, according to</p>

Kommersant newspaper. The information campaign will also seek to counter anti-vaccine messaging, presumably when it targets Russians, say officials.

The newspaper quotes two Kremlin sources as saying the new public service information campaign will be overseen by aides of Sergei Kiriyenko, first deputy chief of staff of Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Kiriyenko is frequently called on by Putin to manage major domestic political initiatives and he was entrusted with overseeing Kremlin operations for the 2018 presidential election.

Last month, deputy parliamentary speaker Pyotr Tolstoy, a Putin ally, said publicly he feared the Kremlin was losing the information battle. He critiqued the government's spotty information effort so far, saying on Russian television, "Unfortunately, we conducted an entire information campaign about the coronavirus in Russia incorrectly and completely lost." Tolstoy added: "People have no trust to go and get vaccinated, this is a fact."

Distrust

Some commentators have suggested the low vaccine uptake can be linked to rising public mistrust of Putin, but some Russian sociologists see a more complex dynamic at play and they say a variety of factors are involved, from conspiracy theories to widespread distrust of Russia's hospitals and medical facilities.

In a recent panel discussion hosted by OpenDemocracy, a political website based in Britain, Anna Temkina, a sociology professor at the European University in St. Petersburg, said the relationship between vaccination attitudes and politics is not clear cut, noting anti-Putin protesters were among the first to get inoculated.

"In Russia, many people are not vaccinated regardless of rumors, regardless of politics, but because they have had a traumatic experience of communicating with medical institutions," Temkina said. "Many of us have such a negative experience of dealing with [Russian] medicine that we know that it is better not to go there at all. In addition, there is also an understanding that it is generally better not to approach any medical facility in an epidemic, since this is a source of infection," she added.

Other sociologists, including Ekaterina Borozdina, a colleague of Temkina's, says vaccine resistance has to be seen in an historical context. She says there has been a persistence bias against vaccines for decades. "Russians are in no rush to get vaccinated, even when it comes to fighting a pandemic and getting back to normal everyday life," she said, speaking at the same panel discussion.

Borozdina says there's a "mistrust of government institutions" and bureaucracy in general. "Even before the emergence of the pandemic about 45 percent of Russians failed to follow the recommended vaccination schedules for their children."

Kremlin spokesperson Peskov admitted midweek that the government has not done enough to explain the importance of getting inoculated. Putin last week urged lawmakers to promote vaccination, saying, "People trust and listen to your advice and recommendations."

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HEADLINE	11/18 Seattle council rejects cuts SPD positions
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/city-council-to-vote-on-seattle-police-department-budget
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - The Seattle City Council has voted to reject an amendment of their budget proposal that would cut 101 officers from the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>The Council voted 5-4 on the measure.</p> <p>Last week, the Council proposed a draft of its 2022 budget. The proposal sees a litany of cuts, reallocations and funds, but most notably lists cuts the Seattle Police budget totaling up to nearly \$11 million. Much of these cuts come from hiring incentives, technology projects funding and community service officers.</p>

These cuts come after Seattle's electoral rejection of more progressive candidates in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and the Defund the Police movement.

"Over the past year, we have already lost 325 officers to retirements, resignations, and cuts. That's essentially like cutting our entire North, West and Southwest precincts. But the Council President's amendment would permanently eliminate another 101 officers. This would greatly jeopardize the safety of our communities and have long-term impacts on investigating violent crimes and caring for our most vulnerable," said interim SPD chief Adrian Diaz before the vote.

Both current Seattle mayor Jenny Durkan and mayor-elect Bruce Harrell expressed their displeasure with the new proposed cuts in the budget.

"City's Council's previous promise to defund SPD by 50%, their treatment of Chief Best and their previous layoff budget led to an exodus of 325 officers from SPD in the last two years. Multiple plans to address hiring and retention proposed by Chief Diaz and I have been repeatedly rejected by a majority of Council. And just yesterday, another Councilmember proposed blocking my emergency hiring proposal that has already generated a tenfold increase in applications to 911 dispatch positions in Seattle. Continued cuts to SPD and underfunding the 911 center are not a plan for true public safety," [Durkan said in a statement last week](#).

"The City Council needs to listen to voters' desire for immediate investments in public safety and reverse the proposed \$10 million cut to the SPD budget. Proposing further cuts deprives the City of resources needed to achieve national best practice staffing levels, decrease response times, and hire and train desperately needed officers – and is in direct conflict with what Seattle voters demanded just last week. It also delays our ability to develop and deploy a new kind of community-based, unarmed officer who will not carry a badge and gun. Overall, we need more, not fewer, public safety resources," [Harrell said in a statement](#).

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HEADLINE	11/18 Ford, GM step into chip business
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ford-enters-semiconductor-business-amid-chip-shortage-impact-11637242202?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>Detroit's two biggest auto makers— Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co. —are looking to get into the semiconductor business, after a year of computer-chip shortages that snarled their global factory output.</p> <p>Ford on Thursday morning outlined a strategic agreement with U.S.-based semiconductor manufacturer GlobalFoundries Inc. to develop chips, a pact that could eventually lead to joint U.S. production.</p> <p>GM later said it was forging ties with some of the biggest names in semiconductors—including Qualcomm Inc. and NXP Semiconductors NV—and has agreements in place to co-develop and manufacture computer chips.</p> <p>The moves are the latest examples of how pandemic-related disruptions are prompting companies to exert greater control over their supply chains by moving production closer to home, or in some cases in-house. Multinational companies got an early shock in the health crisis when border closings, local restrictions and lockdowns caused chaos. Some have decided on permanent solutions.</p> <p>Businesses have also continued to face shipping delays and trucking bottlenecks, prompting them to rethink the geography of their supply chains and giving priority to strategies that ensure reliability over the outsourcing models of the past.</p> <p>In the auto industry, car companies are starting to unwind decisions made over decades to outsource key components to outside suppliers. Recent moves by auto makers to vertically integrate by getting into</p>

battery production and semiconductors are a modern-day nod to when they owned huge parts divisions and operated steel mills.

The semiconductor shortage has scuttled output of millions of planned vehicles industrywide this year. Some car executives have said they are taking steps to get a [better handle on their chip supplies](#), a critical piece of the supply chain into which they have had little visibility.

The crisis is also driving deeper collaboration between industries with executives from both [autos and tech working together](#) to address challenges and introduce new products, especially as more car functions become more automated.

“We need you, and you need us,” [Intel](#) Corp. Chief Executive Pat Gelsinger said at an auto event in September. “This is a symbiotic future that we are off innovating and supplying as the automobile becomes a computer with tires.”

Ford’s move would go a step further by eventually bringing some chip development in-house. The Dearborn, Mich., auto maker said designing its own chips could improve some vehicle features—such as automated-driving capabilities or battery systems for electric vehicles—and potentially help Ford sidestep future shortages.

“We feel like we can really boost our product performance and our tech independence at the same time,” said Chuck Gray, Ford’s vice president of vehicle embedded software and controls.

Part of the agreement with GlobalFoundries is intended to enhance near-term chip supplies for Ford, which has been hit especially hard by the supply crunch relative to many other auto makers. The joint-development work is aimed at producing higher-end chips that would go into vehicles several years out, Mr. Gray said.

Building a serious chip-design operation will be far from a simple undertaking for Ford. Designing sophisticated semiconductors with their minute transistors is a difficult discipline that typically takes companies years to master.

Even before the pandemic jacked up demand for chips, semiconductor companies were complaining of an acute shortage of qualified engineers. Ford will be competing for talent not just against chip companies like Intel and [Nvidia](#) Corp. , but also deep-pocketed tech companies like [Amazon.com](#) Inc. and [Apple](#) Inc. that are increasingly designing chips in house.

GM and Ford exploring the chip business shows how car companies are selectively bringing key technologies in house to develop expertise in areas they see as critical to their future competitiveness. Better, faster chips, for example, will be needed for everything from multimedia touch screens to remote software updates to fix defects.

The auto industry’s pivot to electric vehicles is also accelerating a shift to vertical integration with many car companies worried they won’t be able to secure enough battery supplies and raw materials to meet their growth targets.

Ford, [Volkswagen](#) AG, GM and other major auto makers [are teaming with battery companies](#) to build new factories that they say will give them a technical advantage and more-stable future supplies.

GM President Mark Reuss, on a call with investors Thursday, said the company is working with several semiconductor firms as part of a broader strategy to reduce complexity and improve margins.

“We see the semiconductor requirements more than doubling over the next several years” Mr. Reuss said, adding that the vehicles GM produces are becoming more technologically advanced.

GM also wants to reduce the number of unique microprocessors needed to power increasingly complex and tech-laden vehicles by 95%. To do this, it plans to develop with partners three core families that use similar architectures, Mr. Reuss said. These chips can then be produced in higher volumes and offer better quality and predictability, he said.

Semiconductors are used to electronically control many functions in cars, from engine calibration to steering and air-bag deployment. Those computer chips have been scarce this year as auto makers compete for supply with producers of other consumer goods, including electronics and appliances.

The chip shortage has hurt some auto makers worse than others, while its [duration and course have proven unpredictable](#). Some car executives and analysts have said they expect a gradual easing, although they predict that disruptions will continue through much of 2022 and possibly beyond.

[Much of the problem](#) has been attributed to a shortage of older, relatively inexpensive microcontrollers commonly used across the auto industry. But increasingly, auto makers are moving to more-sophisticated chips as they pursue advancements like electric cars and semiautonomous driving.

GlobalFoundries is based in Malta, N.Y., and owned by Mubadala Investment Co., an investment arm of the Abu Dhabi government. It was created in 2009 when [Advanced Micro Devices](#) Inc. spun off its chip-production operations. The company has said it logged about \$6 billion in revenue last year.

Mike Hogan, a senior vice president in charge of GlobalFoundries automotive business, said the Ford tie-up should improve the auto maker's technical capabilities while expanding future U.S. chip production for the car business broadly.

"This is a great example of how you take a crisis and turn it into an opportunity," he said.

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HEADLINE	11/18 King Co. workforce: 95% fully vaccinated
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3243445/king-county-employee-vaccination-rates-post-mandate/
GIST	<p>King County released the latest numbers on employee vaccination rates on Thursday.</p> <p>A county worker COVID vaccine mandate kicked in on Oct. 18, as did an identical mandate for state and Seattle city employees as well. Two days after it took effect, King County reported that 92% of its employees were fully vaccinated, 639 had requested religious or medical exemptions, and 450 risked being terminated for noncompliance.</p> <p>A month later, those numbers have shifted slightly. As of this week, 95% of county workers are vaccinated. Another 569 are awaiting approval on exemptions, while 3 are reportedly out of compliance. Since the mandate took effect, 48 employees have been terminated for not complying. Twenty-five additional workers opted to resign or retire.</p> <p>The status of the 569 employees waiting to hear back on exemptions remains up in the air. If an exemption is not granted to a worker, they will have two weeks to receive their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, or they will be terminated from their role.</p> <p>"These requests are reviewed on an individual basis, weighing all the unique circumstances of the exemption request and the duties of the employee's job," a spokesperson for King County Executive Dow Constantine said in a press release.</p> <p>The county has yet to release a full, updated breakdown of vaccination rates by department. As of mid-October, 71 sworn officers with the King County Sheriff's Office were still waiting to hear back on accommodations, while 12 were fired for noncompliance. At the time, King County Metro reported 96 employees who did not comply with the mandate out of over 2,600 total employees, as well as 119 with exemptions awaiting accommodations.</p>

HEADLINE	11/18 Gov. seeks federal relief flood damages
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3242827/washington-inslee-federal-relief-flood/
GIST	<p>When the flood damage estimates come in from communities in northern Washington hit hard by this week's storm, the total amount is expected to be in the many millions of dollars.</p> <p>But will the residents who have been forced out of their homes and businesses receive any federal help paying for the cleanup?</p> <p>Governor Jay Inslee says the state is working to secure federal flood relief, but first, Washington will have to meet some dollar loss thresholds.</p> <p>"We have had some success getting loans for hard-hit businesses, and what we're doing right now is trying to compile the amount of damage so that if we get to a certain threshold, we can get some federal assistance," Gov. Inslee said.</p> <p>"We are going to be aggressive in our efforts to obtain federal assistance for these homeowners and business owners," he added. "It will be some period of time [before we know] whether that can be obtained or not."</p> <p>To help with possible claims, property owners are advised to take photos of any flood or weather damage before they start cleanup. They are also advised to save all receipts.</p> <p>Gov. Inslee toured many flood-ravaged parts of Whatcom County on Wednesday. He praised the efforts of rescue crews who risked their lives to bring so many people to safety. Inslee also made note of the death of Everson resident Jose Garcia, whose body was found in a flooded area after he had been missing since Monday.</p> <p>"We've had a very unfortunate loss of one life," Inslee said. "But frankly, it's extremely good fortune that there has not been more loss of life in this community."</p> <p>On Monday, Gov. Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency in Clallam, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, Lewis, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Mason, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Thurston, and Whatcom counties.</p> <p>Days later, some Whatcom County communities are reporting flood damage to more than half of the homes. In Sumas, Washington, officials say three out of four homes are impacted.</p> <p>Flooding hits 75% of Sumas homes as responders stage rescues with boats, tractors</p> <p>For those residents who are still unable to return home, there are a few emergency shelters open in local churches, and a new Red Cross shelter at the fairground's Mount Baker Rotary Building in Lynden.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 B.C. & WA reeling from atmospheric river
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/first-fires-now-floods-british-columbia-and-washington-reeling-from-atmospheric-river/
GIST	<p>First they baked, then they burned, and now they're inundated.</p> <p>The Pacific Northwest and British Columbia have endured a punishing siege of climate disasters since the summer, supercharged by human-caused climate change. After an unprecedented heat wave to close June and a rash of wildfires that followed, the region is now recovering from devastating floods and landslides, blamed for at least two deaths.</p>

In both western Washington state and British Columbia, entire communities were engulfed by floodwaters, which entered homes and businesses early this week, displacing thousands of people. Streets turned into rivers, stranding hundreds of vehicles and leaving some areas inaccessible. In British Columbia, damage to highways and railways from landslides and flooding is so severe that repairs could take weeks or longer.

The cost of this disaster is expected to swell, due to its sweeping effects on property, infrastructure and agriculture.

“[T]his is certainly going to be at a minimum into the hundreds of millions (USD),” wrote Steve Bowen, meteorologist and head of catastrophe insight at reinsurer Aon. “It is within reason to assume that it may pass the billion-dollar threshold as well.”

The exceptional rainfall was caused by a powerful, 2,600-mile-long narrow band of water vapor originating near Hawaii, known as an atmospheric river. Such rivers in the sky have unloaded heavy rain in the region since October, triggering multiple rounds of flooding and mudslides. But the event on Sunday and Monday, rated level 5 out of 5 on the scale for the atmospheric rivers, was the most intense of the season so far.

Floodwaters engulf British Columbia

Officials in British Columbia have described the torrents as “the worst” to hit the province “in a century,” with impacts “significantly greater than expected.” More than 17,700 people were evacuated because of the flooding, according to the provincial government. Hundreds of people trapped in cars were hoisted to safety by military helicopters Monday. At least nine people were shuttled to hospitals; meanwhile, police reported one death.

British Columbia Premier John Horgan declared a provincial state of emergency Wednesday, advising against nonessential travel to the affected areas and the hoarding of goods. He said he expects more fatalities to be confirmed in the coming days.

“These are extraordinary events not measured before, not contemplated before,” Horgan said. “We all know that we live in a rainforest. We get wet in November, but nothing — nothing — remotely resembling this.”

Preliminary reports showed several regions broke single-day rainfall records. Hope, British Columbia, about 75 miles east of Vancouver, received 11.58 inches of rain in 24 hours. The rainstorm damaged and closed several highways in the district, stranding more than 1,000 people.

Armel Castellan, a meteorologist with Environment Canada, told reporters that the rainfall over 24 to 36 hours exceeded what many locations typically see during all of November, which is the wettest month of the year.

On Wednesday, flooding and mudslides had effectively choked off Vancouver from the rest of the province, as large sections of key highways and railroads into Canada’s largest port city were destroyed or damaged, sparking fears of supply shortages.

Roughly 150 miles northeast of Vancouver, a mudslide damaged a stretch of Highway 99 near Lillooet, which received almost two inches of rain from Sunday to Monday. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Tuesday that at least one person had been killed, and that several people were missing.

“The total number of people and vehicles unaccounted for has not been confirmed,” said Sgt. Janelle Shoihet, a spokeswoman for the British Columbia RCMP, “however, investigators have received two missing people reports and believe there may have been other occupied vehicles that were lost in the slide.”

On Sunday, the city of Abbotsford, 40 miles southeast of Vancouver, received 3.95 inches — twice its previous record in 1998. The following day, the city received another 2 inches.

Officials in Abbotsford said 184 people who could not safely evacuate had been rescued by air and water. They had warned Tuesday of the imminent and “catastrophic” failure of a pumping station, but Mayor Henry Braun told reporters Wednesday that the pumping station had held out.

Many volunteers and contractors, he said, had built a road and a dam to protect the pumping station “and buy us some time.”

As officials assessed the damage, aerial footage showed large sections of major highways, farms and homes submerged under muddy brown water. Farmers used motorboats and Jet Skis to rescue cattle — many of them neck deep in cold floodwaters — but officials said that not all livestock were saved.

“I think I saw a few cows that seemed to be floating in the water yesterday from the helicopter,” Braun said. “But we have no numbers. There’s a lot of birds out there, too, poultry — and I saw barns that looked like half-full of water. I can’t imagine that there’s any birds left.”

Many of the communities that have been forced to evacuate because of the flooding had hosted wildfire evacuees or been under evacuation alerts or orders this year because of the raging infernos, including in Merritt, a city of some 7,000 people roughly 160 miles northeast of Vancouver.

Provincial officials have faced questions about whether they had adequately alerted residents to the danger and severity of the forecast weather and whether they could have been better prepared for it. The province has drawn some criticism for not using a system to deliver emergency alerts to mobile phones.

Awash in Washington state

In western Washington, rains have been relentless since mid-October, with some areas topping 40 inches in 30 days. On Monday, the National Weather Service reported four rivers in the region had swelled to record levels. Seattle observed rain in each of the first 15 days of November.

Amid the blast from the atmospheric river Monday, Gov. Jay Inslee, D, declared a severe weather state of emergency in 14 counties.

Whatcom County, Wash., across the border from British Columbia, endured some of the state’s worst flooding. Waters rose above some first-floor windows, inundating homes and businesses in the city of Sumas, right at the Canadian border. The city’s Facebook page estimated that 75% homes incurred water damage.

To the south of Sumas, The Seattle Times reported that [police had recovered the body of a man who was reported missing after his car was swept away by floodwaters](#) Monday morning.

Parts of Bellingham, Wash., about 45 miles south of Vancouver, were also extensively flooded. Drone footage showed vast areas submerged in water. Mudslide debris forced the closure of Interstate 5 near Bellingham on Tuesday. The city received 5.57 inches of rain between Saturday and Monday, more than it typically sees in the entire month of November, according to The Associated Press.

Significant flooding was also reported in Skagit and Clallam counties.

Another storm is expected to bring more rain and mountain snow to the region Thursday night into Friday.

Climate change fueling heat, fire and flood disasters

The waterlogged landscape is a stark contrast to the heat-plagued and drought-stricken scenes just months before. Washington state and British Columbia have faced several extreme weather events

recently, including an oppressive heat wave that killed hundreds of people and cooked shellfish alive at the end of June.

A panel of scientists concluded that the unprecedented heat wave would have been “virtually impossible” without human-caused climate change.

Seattle registered its highest temperature on record June 28, a sweltering 108 degrees. The village of Lytton, about 95 miles northeast of Vancouver, established Canada’s highest temperature on record the next day, soaring to 121 degrees. The day after that, it was devoured by flames.

Devastating wildfires forced many from their homes in British Columbia during the summer months, blanketing the province in heavy smoke. More than 1,600 fires burned about 2.1 million acres of land.

“Over the past six months, we had drought conditions in Merritt where the river was at its lowest point in living memory, where we had people evacuated because of wildfires raging in temperatures that were unprecedented, and now, we have the entire community underwater,” Horgan said.

Scientists found that this abrupt change from record dry to record wet conditions — or precipitation whiplash — is expected to increase with global warming in parts of western North America. Just three weeks ago, another category 5 atmospheric river brought about historic rains to end a record-breaking dry spell in Sacramento. By the end of this century, researchers project that these dry-to-wet precipitation events could increase by 25 to 100% in California.

In a warming world, strengthening atmospheric rivers are expected to boost heavy precipitation events. By the end of the century, these narrow jets of moisture are projected to hit more frequently at a higher intensity (category 4-5), switching from “mostly or primarily beneficial” to “mostly or primarily hazardous,” according to a study published last year.

Another study found atmospheric rivers will be about 25% wider and longer — meaning their heavy rain and strong winds will increase by about 50%. The frequency of the most intense atmospheric rivers is projected to nearly double by 2100.

Aon’s Bowen said that Canada has seen a “notable uptick” in costly disasters in the past decade. “As the influence of climate change on behavioral patterns of weather events becomes even more evident, Canada is likely to be facing more of these extreme types of events in the years to come,” he wrote.

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HEADLINE	11/19 China nationals deported, Americans return
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/19/world/asia/us-china-exit-ban-deport.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>Shortly before President Biden and China’s leader, Xi Jinping, met for a virtual summit this week, the United States sent seven Chinese nationals who had been convicted of crimes back to China, and Beijing lifted an exit ban on an American citizen who had been blocked from leaving for four years.</p> <p>One of the Chinese nationals who was repatriated was a woman who had been convicted in 2019 of trespassing after she had entered former President Donald J. Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort with a cache of electronics, according to a senior administration official. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic affairs.</p> <p>China’s foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The moves came less than two months after the United States reached an agreement to allow Meng Wanzhou, a senior executive at the Chinese tech giant Huawei, to return home after a nearly three-year diplomatic standoff. China reciprocated within hours, releasing two Canadians whom it had held since shortly after Ms. Meng was arrested in Canada.</p>

[Two American siblings](#) who had been blocked from leaving China for more than three years were also allowed to return to the United States. The siblings — Victor Liu, a student at Georgetown University, and Cynthia Liu, a consultant at McKinsey & Company — had never been accused of wrongdoing in China. But their father, Liu Changming, a former executive at a Chinese bank, was [wanted by the Chinese police](#) for his role in a fraud case.

The exit ban on Mr. Liu's children was seen as a way to pressure Mr. Liu to return to China and turn himself in.

The series of diplomatic actions appeared to have been intended to cool tensions between the two governments, which have become increasingly confrontational on trade, technology, human rights, the future of Taiwan and other issues. At their video summit this week, Mr. Biden and Mr. Xi [reached no breakthrough accords](#), agreeing only on the need to prevent frictions from escalating into all-out conflict.

The American who was allowed to leave China this month, Daniel Hsu, has not been convicted of any crimes in China. Mr. Hsu [told The Associated Press](#) last year that the Chinese authorities blocked him and his wife from returning to their home in Washington State in August 2017, in what Mr. Hsu said was an apparent attempt to convince his father to return to China and face embezzlement charges. Mr. Hsu's father, Xu Weiming, denies the charges, The A.P. reported.

Mr. Hsu's return to the United States was [reported earlier by Reuters](#).

The State Department has been [warning Americans](#) who are considering travel to China of the risk of "arbitrary detention and exit bans." In most cases, the department says, U.S. citizens only become aware of an exit ban when they try to leave China.

One of the Chinese nationals whom the United States sent back to China last Friday is [Yujing Zhang](#), a businesswoman who talked her way into Mr. Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in 2019. After Ms. Zhang was questioned by the Secret Service, agents found that she was carrying four cellphones, a laptop and an external hard drive. They found an additional trove of gear in her room in a different hotel.

The incident [exposed holes](#) in Mr. Trump's security apparatus. But [Ms. Zhang's trial](#) in Fort Lauderdale, at the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida, did not attempt to address whether she had been engaging in espionage.

The Miami Herald [reported this month](#) that Ms. Zhang finished serving her eight-month sentence in late 2019 but was held in immigration custody for much longer thereafter because of "deportation delays" related to the coronavirus pandemic.

China's foreign ministry this week also announced the repatriation from the United States of Xu Guojun, a former bank executive who had fled China two decades ago after being accused of [corruption and embezzlement](#). A federal jury in Las Vegas [found Mr. Xu guilty of conspiracy charges](#) in 2008.

The Chinese foreign ministry [hailed Mr. Xu's return](#) to China as a "major achievement" in the authorities' 20-year pursuit of justice in the case.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Brazil Amazon deforestation surges
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/nov/18/brazils-amazon-deforestation-surges-to-worst-in-15/
GIST	RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — The area deforested in Brazil's Amazon reached a 15-year high after a 22% jump from the prior year, according to official data published Thursday.

The National Institute for Space Research's Prodes monitoring system showed the Brazilian Amazon lost 13,235 square kilometers of rainforest in the 12-month reference period from Aug. 2020 to July 2021. That's the most since 2006.

The 15-year high flies in the face of Bolsonaro government's recent attempts to shore up its environmental credibility, having made overtures to the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden and moved forward its commitment to end illegal deforestation at the United Nations climate summit in Glasgow this month.

Before Jair Bolsonaro's term began in Jan. 2019, the Brazilian Amazon hadn't recorded a single year with more than 10,000 square kilometers of deforestation in over a decade. Between 2009 and 2018, the average was 6,500 square kilometers. Since then, the annual average leapt to 11,405 square kilometers, and the three-year total is an area bigger than the state of Maryland.

"It is a shame. It is a crime," Márcio Astrini, executive secretary of the Climate Observatory, a network of environmental nonprofit groups, told The Associated Press. "We are seeing the Amazon rainforest being destroyed by a government which made environmental destruction its public policy."

Bolsonaro took office with promises to develop the Amazon, and dismissing global outcry about its destruction. His administration has defanged environmental authorities and backed legislative measures to loosen land protections, emboldening land grabbers. This week at a conference in the United Arab Emirates to attract investment, he told the crowd that attacks on Brazil for deforestation are unfair and that most of the Amazon remains pristine.

Brazil's environment ministry didn't immediately respond to an AP email requesting comment on the Prodes data showing higher deforestation.

The state of Para accounted for 40% of deforestation from Aug. 2020 to July 2021, according to the data, the most of any of nine states in the Amazon region. But its year-on-year increase was slight compared to Mato Grosso and Amazonas states, which together accounted for 34% of the region's destruction. The two states suffered 27% and 55% more deforestation, respectively.

And early data for the 2021-2022 reference period signals further deterioration. The space agency's monthly monitoring system, Deter, detected higher deforestation year-on-year during both September and October. Deter is less reliable than Prodes, but widely seen as a leading indicator.

"This is the real Brazil that the Bolsonaro government tries to hide with fantastical speeches and actions of greenwashing abroad," Mauricio Voivodic, international environmental group WWF's executive director for Brazil, said in a statement after release of the Prodes data. "The reality shows that the Bolsonaro government accelerated the path of Amazon destruction."

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HEADLINE	11/18 Canada disaster: 18,000 still stranded
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/residents-brace-for-torrential-rains-in-already-flooded-western-canada
GIST	<p>Emergency crews in western Canada were still trying to reach some 18,000 people stranded by landslides and struggling to find food among bare grocery store shelves after devastating flooding.</p> <p>With communities in the region braced for more torrential rain in already inundated areas next week, the premier of British Columbia province declared an emergency and gave an emotional address in a press conference on Thursday.</p> <p>Appearing to fight back tears, John Horgan said: "The positive I'm going to take out of this is that it had shown British Columbians coming together supporting each other."</p>

“Canadians are supporting our province that we are one big family and absolutely that to me is something that we all instinctively know it is absolutely just a remarkable feature and facet of our communities, our people, our province and our country.

“This has been a terrible terrible disaster but I know this: As British Columbians, as Canadians, we stick together. I want to come out of this. I’m going to build a stronger better province and a stronger and better country.”

One person is confirmed dead in [a landslide that swept vehicles off a road near the village of Pemberton](#), but with many others missing – and with searchers still combing through the debris – that number is almost certain to rise.

“I am not concerned about today’s rain. What I’m concerned about is next week, and what’s coming,” said Henry Braun, mayor of the city of Abbotsford where officials kept close watch over a pumping station. If the pumps failed, Braun warned, the results would be “catastrophic” for a community already grappling with thousands of drowned farm animals and a bill that could reach \$1bn to rebuild the city.

As the military [joined the effort to rescue thousands left stranded](#) by the floods, residents say the recent days have exposed the vulnerability of small communities to natural disasters worsened by the climate crisis.

When Krystal Babcock got word that a wildfire was approaching her community of Merritt earlier this summer, she and her family prepared to leave as dark clouds of smoke blacked out the sky. The town was spared but when turbid flood waters rushed through it months later, Babcock knew she couldn’t leave.

Her mother needed care and her father was without a vehicle. “I just sat there speechless. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know what to think. You’re told to grab what you can and get out. Some people didn’t even have time to grab anything.”

As officials issued a mandatory evacuation order, she stayed behind.

She and a handful of others are the few that remain in the mountain town submerged in muddy water earlier this week. The family has taken to using their motorhome as a restroom and are washing everything “pioneer-style” in basins after the town’s water treatment plant shut down. They have enough food and friends have passed them water and supplies at a police checkpoint near the town limits.

“We’re just trying to help each other out and survive,” she said. “But right now, we’re literally cut off from everything.”

But as she cares for her parents, Babcock has grown frustrated that more care wasn’t taken in helping people evacuate, especially those with greater needs who have difficulty moving.

With most roads closed, the majority of Merritt’s 7,000 residents travelled to nearby Kamloops, where they were told by emergency services that shelter and warm food was waiting. Soon, stories began trickling back of long lines to find shelter.

Melanie Racher arrived in Kamloops with her husband, family dog, diabetic mother and elderly father to find hundreds of people waiting ahead of them to be temporarily housed – and quickly hundreds lined up behind her. Despite promises from emergency services she would get a call, none came.

“We ended up sleeping in our car. And there was elderly people outside in the snow, sleeping, having to wait overnight”, she said. “And they never got phone calls back either.”

Frustrated, the family drove an hour and a half east to Vernon, where they rented a hotel room.

“We ended up depleting my dad’s savings account for the room. We’re very fortunate to have the money – but we can’t do this for months or weeks. We don’t know how long that’s going to happen,” she said.

With major highways washed out across the south-western areas of the province, travelers have remained trapped for days.

Allie Dexel was driving home over the weekend when she and her partner narrowly missed multiple slides that choked off traffic and destroyed sections of the highway.

“We spent a cold night in the car with no water left next to the mountain which had copious amounts of water coming down off of it onto the road,” she said. “We were worried there would be another landslide where we were, but we had nowhere else to go.”

The couple eventually joined 300 other stranded travelers at Camp Hope, where they have been since Monday. Dexel has a spotty internet signal from a diesel generator, but no mobile reception. She sleeps on a mattress on the floor but considers herself lucky.

Food was recently brought in by helicopter, neighbors with chickens have provided eggs and the Chawathil and Skawahlook First Nation sent over canned salmon and a bag of rice. Members of the Lytton First Nation, who are also at Camp Hope after being displaced by fires months ago, have also welcomed the newcomers.

“Initially I was so focused on surviving and coping with being caught up in a natural disaster that I was only really aware of our immediate situation,” she said. “Every time I see a new image, I feel like I have to stare at it for minute to really believe it. It’s impossible not to reflect on climate change and worry about our future with the flooding and slides after the wildfires we had in the summer.”

As Babcock surveys her community, now covered by muddy debris and a fresh dusting of snow, she also worries how vulnerable her family will be in the future and how long they can stay.

Merritt is used to fires in the summer and floods in the spring as snow melts from the surrounding hills, but the speed and ferocity with which the water overtook the community – and a fire season that stripped the surrounding hills of critical vegetation to help slow the water – has left Babcock in shock.

“The water has never done anything like this. I would have never thought that that water could come that fast ... There was no time before the town was turned into a river,” she said.

“This has been a really big eye opener for us. We were thinking of moving before, but this has pushed us even more. We all know the town is in a floodplain. But the fact that it can happen this fast from rain is just unbelievable.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 New Zealand Covid restrictions pushback
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/dissent-threats-and-fury-mood-darkens-in-new-zealand-as-covid-restrictions-bite
GIST	<p>For more than a year, New Zealand’s “team of 5 million” stood largely united in the face of Covid-19. This month, as the country expanded vaccine mandates and a tougher roadmap of restrictions for the unvaccinated, that mood has splintered and darkened. Among a small but vocal sliver of the population, dissent has been turning ugly, with death threats against MPs and journalists, increasing protests, warnings from security services about Covid-prompted terror threats, and what researchers have called a “wave” of disinformation tinged with violent rhetoric, QAnon-style conspiracy theories and far-right undertones.</p> <p>“We’re talking ... your aunt and uncle type-people using language like Nuremberg 2.0, common law trials, like ‘the prime minister is a Nazi’ – these are quite extreme terms and terminologies,” says Kate</p>

Hannah, a research fellow at Te Pūnaha Matatini's disinformation project, a research institute that monitors online extremism and rhetoric. Hannah says the team observed an incredibly rapid shift in both the volume and tone of disinformation circulating in New Zealand's online communities since the Delta outbreak and [level 4 lockdown began](#).

"Since August 2021 to now, there has been almost a day-on-day increase in both the volume of production of misinformation products or things being shared, the level of engagement by communities ... and also the tone," she said. An unregulated online environment, particularly on chat app Telegram, she said, had "normalised – very, very quickly – content which is extremely violent."

Some of that online chatter manifested in the flesh last week in a series of anti-vaccine mandate protests, several-thousand strong. While the protests were broadly peaceful, one police officer was bitten by a demonstrator, and a news outlet reported that one of their journalists had been harassed and pushed by protesters.

The signs and slogans proffered by the crowds presented an odd blend of factions and allegiances – tino rangatiratanga [Māori sovereignty] flags alongside Nazi imagery, anti-vaccine mottoes, evangelical preachers, those calling for the prime minister's arrest and execution. Hannah says that same blend is what researchers are seeing online – where the rhetoric and networks of vaccine-scepticism are acting as a "Trojan horse" for more extreme ideologies.

"People genuinely feel excluded from society – there are genuine grievances and genuine fears," Hannah said. And the shifts in political rhetoric have accompanied the country's material change in pandemic fortunes. While the country [rode out most of 2020 as a Covid-free idyll](#), now it has had to reckon with months-long lockdowns, steadily growing case numbers, near-daily deaths, and the threat of lost jobs and freedoms for those who refuse vaccination.

While it will still likely emerge with relatively low rates of illness and death, current circumstances have unleashed new levels of loss and uncertainty. Internationally, Hannah says many of those same tensions and injuries have played out over the course of a year – now, they're hitting [New Zealand](#) all at once, and it makes some sense that that would be accompanied by a corresponding wave of dissatisfaction, dissent and fury.

"There is the sense that we are playing really fast catch-up," Hannah said. "All of the things that are great about having been here – like we have only had 35 deaths – also mean that it's so much harder for everybody to conceive of what everybody else [around the world] has experienced. So the sense of genuine disenfranchisement, the sense of genuine fear that harm is occurring to people – those are really genuine and sincere."

'Things are starting to escalate'

The threat of that rhetoric exploding into violence has been acknowledged by both parliament and the country's counter-terror services.

This week, the country boosted its parliamentary security, after a spate of death threats against members of parliament and cabinet. Parliamentary services added a small budget to help MPs change locks or security systems. While she has not reported specific threats by anti-vaccine mandate campaigners, prime minister Jacinda Ardern has had a string of death threats since she took the job, including several men charged through the courts. She is a frequent subject of online screeds, and some protesters' written slogans last week specifically called for violence against the prime minister. Covid response minister and leader of the house Chris Hipkins said that one of his electoral offices had been subject to repeated attacks from anti-vaxxers, and that he had stepped up security.

The Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG), an inter-agency government security group, has identified backlash to Covid-19 restrictions or vaccine mandates as a potential threat. [In documents published by Newshub this month](#), they write that "Further restrictions or potential vaccination

programmes in New Zealand could be triggers for New Zealand-based violent extremists to conduct an act of terrorist violence.”

“Things are starting to escalate,” Labour whip Kieran McNulty [told Stuff on Tuesday](#), after he’d been publicly denounced by an anti-vaccine campaigner, who said those pushing it should be killed by a lethal injection. “Let’s take it seriously.” McNulty had met with parliamentary services to ask that more security measures be considered.

Those interventions came with a measure of sadness – New Zealand has long valued its highly accessible democracy, where government grounds are open, tours of parliament are easily accessible, and MPs are not typically accompanied by security. “I’ve always believed that New Zealand parliamentarians being as accessible as we are is something special about New Zealand, and I’m generally reluctant to see that change,” Hipkins said.

“The actions of a small group of individuals is the problem here, and it would be sad to see the openness of our democracy being undermined by a small group of vocal and aggressive people.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Experts: steep rise Covid cases in winter
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/zero-covid-experts-predict-rise-us-cases-winter
GIST	<p>A steep rise in Covid-19 cases in Europe should serve as a warning that the US could also see significant increases in coronavirus cases this winter, particularly in the nation’s colder regions, scientists say.</p> <p>However, there is more cause for optimism as America enters its second pandemic winter, even in the face of likely rises in cases.</p> <p>Evidence shows vaccine-conferred protection against hospitalization and death remains high several months after inoculation, vaccines for children older than five can reduce Covid transmission, and new antiviral medications hold the promise of making Covid-19 a treatable disease.</p> <p>“I do expect to see cases increasing – we’ve started to see this in the last week or so,” said Dr David Dowdy, an associate professor of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. “I don’t think what we’re seeing in Europe means we’re in for a huge surge of serious illness and death as we [saw] here in the US,” last winter.</p> <p>In the last three weeks, new cases have increased in several cold weather states across New England and the midwest. However, vaccines remain roughly 85% effective at preventing hospitalization and death. “Even if cases go up this winter, we’re very unlikely to see the overcrowded [intensive care units] and morgues of a year ago,” said Dowdy.</p> <p>Vaccine-conferred immunity against infection may allow cases to rise, he said, but far fewer people will need hospitalization. The vast majority of people who were hospitalized or died from Covid-19 this summer, more than 90% in one CDC study, were not fully vaccinated.</p> <p>“People can still get Covid, there can still be breakthrough infections, but the great news is if you have been vaccinated you are very much less likely to be hospitalized or have severe infection,” said Rupali Limaye, an associate scientist at Johns Hopkins University and an expert in vaccine communication.</p> <p>Nevertheless, vaccine distribution is highly uneven across the US. Just 58.6% of the nation is vaccinated, lower than vaccination rates in some European nations now struggling with an increase in Covid-19 cases, such as in Germany and France.</p> <p>“I’ve been predicting a pretty bad winter wave again, and it looks like it’s starting to happen,” said Dr Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and co-director of the Texas Children’s hospital’s center for vaccine development.</p>

“There’s just too many unvaccinated and too many partially vaccinated [people]” to stop the “aggressive” Delta variant, Hotez said.

What’s more, even if the impacts of Covid-19 are dampened this winter, there still could be a devastating loss of life. A prediction from among the most respected long-term Covid-19 forecasters in the country found an additional 100,000 people may die between November 2021 and March 2022.

“We see increasing evidence in the northern hemisphere that the expected winter surge has started to unfold,” said Dr Christopher JL Murray, lead modeler at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, as he introduced a new forecast. “Reductions in cases and new infections and hospitalizations have stopped in the US and started to turn around.”

[IHME’s projection](#), which Murray described as “optimistic”, forecast 863,000 cumulative deaths from the pandemic by March 2022. Already, more than 765,000 people in the US have died from Covid-19.

IHME’s worst-case scenario predicts hundreds of thousands more deaths, for more than 1m pandemic deaths by March 2022.

“Many countries in western Europe are even farther ahead of us in the sense that the numbers are going up quite quickly in the places like the Netherlands and Denmark, but also in Germany now and a number of other countries,” said Murray. Nearly two-thirds of the 1.9m new infections globally are on the European continent, the [World Health Organization](#) said.

Further, there are few calls and little appetite to reinstate social restrictions. The promise of vaccines that could reduce transmission of Covid-19 prompted local governments around the country to [drop social distancing](#) and mask restrictions.

That trend has held even as an emerging body of evidence showed the vaccine’s ability to prevent infection with Covid-19 waned over time, and the focus of vaccine efficacy shifted to the steady protection conferred against hospitalization and death.

The risk of a “fifth wave” and waning immunity has now prompted a call for “booster” shots, or third vaccine doses, for everyone who received mRNA vaccines, those developed by Pfizer or Moderna.

The Food and Drug Administration has already authorized booster doses for people older than 65 or who work in high-risk settings. Everyone older than 18 who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is eligible for a second dose, as evidence shows its effectiveness against serious disease may wane over time.

Booster doses are effective at increasing antibody levels, but are not the most effective way to curb transmission of Covid-19. The best way to curb transmission, experts have said repeatedly, is to get new people vaccinated. Experts now widely believe Covid-19 will be endemic and circulate for decades to come, though the severity of infection may wane over many years.

The Covid-19 pandemic may never be “over”, as many conceived early in the pandemic, Dowdy said. “The point is – when can we get this to a point where it’s tolerable to us as a society? And I think we may be closer to that point than we imagine.

“Zero-Covid is not going to happen.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 CBO: social policy bill adds to deficit
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/us/politics/cbo-biden-spending-bill.html

GIST

WASHINGTON — The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said on Thursday that President Biden's sprawling climate change and social policy package would increase the federal budget deficit by \$160 billion over the next 10 years.

That determination was at odds with Mr. Biden's pledge to fully pay for the \$1.85 trillion legislation but was unlikely to stop House Democrats from approving the bill.

Plans to do so Thursday evening, however, were derailed when a marathon speech by Representative Kevin McCarthy of California, the minority leader, prompted Democratic leaders to send members home with plans to reconvene at 8 a.m. on Friday.

The budget office's analysis found that the bill's tax cuts and spending programs were almost — but not entirely — offset by new revenue and spending cuts. The package would be largely paid for with tax increases on high earners and corporations, which were estimated to bring in nearly \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. Savings in government spending on prescription drugs were estimated to bring in another \$260 billion.

The fact that the bill could slightly add to the federal deficit over the next 10 years was unlikely to dissuade House lawmakers from proceeding to vote for the bill, in part because the analysis boiled down to a dispute over a single line item: how much the Internal Revenue Service would collect by cracking down on people and companies that dodge large tax bills.

The budget office predicted that the total impact on the federal deficit from the bill would be \$367 billion over 10 years. But that estimate did not include the \$207 billion in additional revenues the office estimates the I.R.S. would ultimately collect from tax cheats. Those revenues would shrink the projected deficit to \$160 billion over 10 years.

The estimated money raised from I.R.S. funding was far less than the \$400 billion the White House estimated it would bring in over a decade, both through enforcement actions and by essentially scaring tax cheats into paying what they owe. White House officials and past I.R.S. commissioners say the budget office's estimates are too conservative. Using the White House estimates for I.R.S. revenues, the overall bill would actually reduce the deficit by \$112 billion.

Democrats, who have stuffed the bill with long-desired priorities and policy changes, took turns on Thursday highlighting its array of environmental provisions, an expansion of health care and support for education and child care.

"We have a chance to redefine our commitment to the American people and to move toward a more just, equitable and perfect union," said Representative Jimmy Gomez, Democrat of California.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi talked up the areas of agreement that Democrats had reached in both the House and the Senate: universal prekindergarten, generous assistance with child care costs, prescription drug price controls and home health care for older Americans.

Senator Ron Wyden, Democrat of Oregon and the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, dismissed the budget office's analysis of how much the I.R.S. could catch from tax cheats and said that he agreed with the Treasury Department's rosier projection.

"I'm confident in the Treasury Department's estimate, which is backed up by experts and I.R.S. commissioners appointed by Republican and Democratic presidents," he said in a statement.

Passage of Mr. Biden's signature bill has been held up for weeks by infighting among Democrats, who have sparred over which priorities to include and how to pay for the measure, with some insisting that it not add to the federal budget deficit.

Until Thursday, it was unclear what House Democrats would do if the bill was found to add to the deficit. But some moderate Democrats have signaled that they are likely to side with the administration's position that the deficit impact will be negligible.

"While I continue to have reservations about the overall size of the legislation — and concerns about certain policy provisions that are extraneous or unwise — I believe there are too many badly needed investments in this bill not to advance it in the legislative process," Representative Stephanie Murphy of Florida, a key centrist, said in a statement announcing her support for the legislation.

Such views could pave the way for the plan to clear the House.

Still, the assessment from the budget office could complicate the bill's prospects in the Senate, where the legislation is expected to change considerably if it hopes to pass on a party-line vote. Democrats have no votes to spare in the Senate, and moderates such as Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia have expressed concern that more spending could fuel further inflation, which is currently running at its hottest rate in 30 years.

There were bright spots for Mr. Biden and his party in the budget office analysis. It confirmed that in the eyes of the congressional scorekeepers, the Democratic bill would add significantly less to deficits over a decade than the large collection of tax cuts Republicans passed under President Donald J. Trump in 2017. The budget office initially estimated that those tax cuts would add about \$1.5 trillion to deficits, even as Republicans claimed their cuts would pay for themselves.

The single biggest source of revenue stems from a new 15 percent tax that would apply to corporations that report more than \$1 billion in profits to shareholders but not the I.R.S. The budget office found that a tax on so-called book income would raise about \$319 billion over 10 years.

Senator Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts Democrat who proposed the new tax, released an analysis on Thursday morning showing that at least 70 of the largest companies in the United States would pay more as a result of the new levy. The report by Ms. Warren found that the tax would require companies such as Amazon, Facebook, FedEx, General Motors, Google, T-Mobile and Verizon to pay more to the U.S. government.

The analysis also suggests that the Democratic plan could begin to reduce budget deficits a decade from now, if provisions in the bill expire as scheduled. The bill's tax increases are permanent, while many of its tax cuts and spending programs are set to be temporary, a move that Republicans have criticized as a budget gimmick intended to keep the overall cost down.

"Here what we're doing is making smart long-term investments but offsetting those with tax increases," Brian Deese, the director of the National Economic Council, said Sunday on ABC's "This Week." "When you do that, a fully paid for, you actually reduce the deficit over the long term."

If a future Congress chose to extend those spending programs and tax cuts, though, or to make them permanent, and did not offset them with further tax increases, the bill would add significantly to deficits after a decade. Budget experts have warned of that possibility, which was also true of the Republican tax law. It set individual tax cuts to expire after 2025, even though Republicans immediately vowed to work to make them permanent.

Republicans have accused Democrats of gaming the budget rules by providing child care and health care tax credits and universal preschool that would expire but which Democrats hope will be made permanent. A new \$80,000 cap on the state and local tax deduction would slip back to \$10,000 for a year in 2030 before it expired the following year.

Mr. Biden has proposed trillions of dollars in tax increases on high earners and businesses, though he has vowed not to raise direct taxes on people earning \$400,000 or less.

If the bill clears the House, it faces a difficult road in the Senate, where Republicans will have a clear shot to offer politically difficult amendments, any one of which could unravel the delicate Democratic coalition behind it. Two Democratic centrists, Mr. Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have not committed to supporting it, and a single defection would bring the measure down in the evenly divided chamber.

Some significant provisions remain in play, including a measure to grant work permits and legal protection to many undocumented immigrants; funding for four weeks of paid family and medical leave; and a generous increase in the federal tax deduction for state and local taxes paid, to \$80,000 a year from \$10,000.

Liberals like Senator Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent who is the chairman of the Budget Committee, and at least one centrist Democrat, Representative Jared Golden of Maine, have raised strong objections to that tax measure, which would amount to a major tax cut for wealthy homeowners who itemize their deductions. Mr. Sanders and other senators are discussing limiting who can benefit from the increased deduction based on income.

Having capped the deduction in their 2017 tax law, Republicans have also singled out the provision in their attacks on the legislation. Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the minority leader, scoffed, “I’m almost impressed our colleagues have found a way to be this out of touch.”

Some outside groups have found that the bill will not pay for itself. The Penn Wharton Budget Model at the University of Pennsylvania estimated it would add about \$275 billion to the debt over a decade, before accounting for any effects of the legislation on economic growth. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimated it would add about \$200 billion to the debt.

Republicans have used those analyses to cast Democrats as fiscally reckless and risking adding more to inflation rates.

During debate on the House floor on Thursday, Representative Jason Smith of Missouri, the top Republican on the House Budget Committee, said that the legislation “bankrupts the economy, benefits the wealthy and it builds the Washington machine.”

“Must be easy to be a Republican in Congress these days because you make things up, you can throw out numbers, without any fear of being contradicted,” Representative John Yarmuth, Democrat of Kentucky and the committee’s chairman, shot back.

White House officials have for weeks been bracing lawmakers for the prospect of a disappointing result from the budget office, arguing that it was using out-of-date models in some cases. They had reached an agreement of sorts with moderate House Democrats to use the administration’s assessment of I.R.S. enforcement revenues when evaluating whether the bill was fully paid for.

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HEADLINE	11/18 US diplomatic boycott of Beijing Olympics?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/us/politics/beijing-olympics-boycott.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden said on Thursday that the United States was considering a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, as pressure grows to hold China accountable for human rights abuses.</p> <p>A boycott would mean that government officials would not attend the Games, which are slated to begin in February, though it would not prevent U.S. athletes from competing.</p> <p>As he met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada at the White House, Mr. Biden responded to a reporter’s question about the potential for a diplomatic boycott by saying it was “something we are considering.”</p>

The comment came days after a [virtual meeting between Mr. Biden and China's leader, Xi Jinping](#), that was meant to prevent increasing tensions from [turning into a broader conflict](#). While Mr. Xi warned the administration against supporting Taiwan, Mr. Biden raised concerns about abuses in the Xinjiang region, Tibet and Hong Kong, according to a White House statement.

[Abuses against the Uyghur community](#), as well as a [crackdown on free speech in Hong Kong](#), have prompted calls from about 180 human rights organizations and members of Congress to use the Olympics as an opportunity to hold China accountable. But while some see a diplomatic boycott as a way to send a message without punishing U.S. athletes, others questioned the effectiveness of withholding a government delegation when public attention is on the athletic competition.

“Whether we want it or not, the Olympics in Beijing are going to happen,” said Frédéric Mégret, a co-director of the Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism at McGill University and an international human rights lawyer. “The question is: Do you want to give the Chinese government photo ops?”

Bipartisan support for a boycott of some kind has steadily increased. Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California this year called for the president to withhold a U.S. delegation from attending, although she has said that athletes should be able to compete. Senator Tom Cotton, Republican of Arkansas, called on Thursday for a total boycott of the Beijing Games.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken told The New York Times last week that the United States was discussing with allies “how they’re thinking about participation” in the Olympics. “It’s an active conversation,” he said. Governments in Canada and Europe have also faced pressure to boycott the Games.

The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, which would need to sign off on any full boycott, has made clear that it does not support a boycott that would prevent American athletes from competing in Beijing.

“They have been shown to negatively impact athletes while not effectively addressing global issues,” Kate Hartman, a spokeswoman for the committee, said of boycotts. “We believe that the more effective course of action is for the governments of the world and China to engage directly on human rights and geopolitical issues.” She did not respond to a follow-up question on what form of engagement the committee would prefer.

Mr. Biden and Mr. Xi did not discuss the Beijing Olympics when they met on Monday, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said on Thursday.

But she acknowledged that “we do have concern,” noting the human rights abuses. Ms. Psaki did not respond to an email asking whether the president had made a decision about the Games.

The last time the United States fully boycotted the Olympics was in 1980, when President Jimmy Carter rallied against allowing athletes to participate in the Summer Games in Moscow to protest the Soviet Union’s military presence in Afghanistan. The move is widely regarded as producing few tangible results while providing Russia with ample talking points.

“It was seen as a propaganda victory for the Soviets at the time,” Mr. Mégret said. “It was seen as mostly punishing U.S. athletes and not really having any effect on the Soviet Union.”

Senator Mitt Romney, Republican of Utah, echoed that sentiment this year. The senator, who ran the committee that organized the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, wrote a [New York Times Op-Ed](#) calling for an economic and diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Olympics rather than preventing athletes from competing.

Limiting a boycott to government officials can be a way to send a message to the leaders of the host country while also allowing athletes to compete and protest oppression on the global stage, historians said.

After Russia passed anti-L.G.B.T.Q. legislation in 2013, [President Barack Obama included three gay athletes in a U.S. delegation](#) to the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

One of the more famous scenes in Olympic history was in 1968, when the sprinters John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists in a symbol of Black power.

“Regimes have a history of treating their hosts of the Olympics with an international seal of approval for whatever they’re doing,” said John Soares, a history professor at Notre Dame who has written about the Olympics. “Critics of a regime’s human rights record or other aspects of their policy say you don’t want to supply that seal of approval.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Trilateral summit: US, Canada, Mexico
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/us/politics/us-canada-mexico-summit.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden hosted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador of Mexico at the White House on Thursday, a diplomatic mission that saw three leaders trying to project a united front amid trade scuffles, accusations of American protectionism and ongoing concerns over surging migration at the U.S.-Mexico border.</p> <p>But while they agreed to form a working group on regional supply chain issues, including for critical minerals, and struck an agreement to share vaccines, the leaders seemed intent on relaying diplomatic niceties over tackling thornier questions like trade disputes or the surging numbers of migrants.</p> <p>“We can meet all of the challenges if we just take the time to speak with one another,” Mr. Biden said during a meeting with both leaders on Thursday evening.</p> <p>The return of the summit after a five-year hiatus signaled an increased appetite among North American leaders to show a sense of strategic and economic solidarity amid a rise in competition from Asia and Europe. The gathering also comes at a critical moment for the United States, as the breakdown in global supply chains and the mass movement of people across the Americas has made cooperation with Mexico and Canada more vital than ever.</p> <p>“This is one of the easiest relationships that we have,” Mr. Biden said during a meeting with Mr. Trudeau, glossing over Canada’s complaints that the president’s buy-American policies on goods like electric vehicles have disrupted commerce between the two countries.</p> <p>In his first in-person meeting with Mr. López Obrador since becoming president, Mr. Biden, speaking through a translator, said he saw the United States and Mexico as equals. The Mexican president praised Mr. Biden’s plan to provide citizenship to over 11 million undocumented migrants living in the United States, a proposal that has gained little steam in Congress.</p> <p>Throughout the day, each leader declined to answer questions from reporters about American policies that turn asylum seekers back to Mexico. Mr. Biden’s advisers said the group would discuss humane ways to address the root causes that drive people north and would confront the flow of fentanyl and other drugs toward the U.S.-Mexico border. But they also said the group would not discuss policies that have become flash points for immigration activists, including a program that forces some asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases are pending.</p> <p>When asked how the problem of migration could be discussed without mentioning those programs, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, told reporters that pending litigation prevented the policy, known as Remain in Mexico, from being openly discussed, “but certainly migration will be.”</p> <p>One day before the summit, more than 70 human rights and immigration advocacy organizations pressed Mr. Biden and his counterparts to discuss what they described as “cruel, ineffective and unlawful” immigration policies.</p>

No accords were struck over ongoing disagreements over how each country has handled its trade commitments. Since Mr. Biden took office, the particulars of that Trump-era revision of the North American Free Trade Agreement, called the United States Mexico Canada Agreement, have been in dispute. The pact sought to update Mexico's labor laws, encourage more auto production in North America, and open Canadian markets for American dairy farmers.

In recent weeks, the Canadian government has argued that the tax credit offered to American consumers who buy American-made electric vehicles is in breach of the accord. Speaking to reporters in a news conference on Monday, Mr. Trudeau said that the Biden administration's buy-American ethos was "counterproductive" to promoting commerce between the two countries.

"We don't view it that way," Ms. Psaki said to reporters on Thursday. "In our view, the electric vehicle tax credit is an opportunity to help consumers in this country."

For its part, the Biden administration has accused the Canadian government of practices that favor their domestic dairy farmers and has raised concerns that Mexico's energy policies give state-owned companies an unfair advantage. American officials said on Wednesday that Mr. Biden planned to reaffirm U.S.M.C.A. provisions in support of labor rights protection, a reference to a dispute settled against Mexico earlier this year.

The leaders did strike an agreement over vaccine sharing, with Canada and Mexico agreeing to share "millions" of doses with poorer countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, an official said.

For Mr. Biden, the more delicate discussions were sure to come with Mexico's president, who has lashed out at the United States and pursued policies that run counter to American interests. While Mr. López Obrador lavished praise on President Donald J. Trump for not interfering in Mexican affairs, he has taken a more openly confrontational stance toward American policies since Mr. Biden took office.

Mexico, long an underdog in the relationship with its neighbors, has earned considerable leverage in a year that saw a wave of pandemic-fueled migration from Latin America. For the Biden administration, the importance of maintaining strong Mexican enforcement was made clear in September, when thousands of Haitians walked across the border to Texas.

"The power balance between the Mexican government and the U.S. government has shifted because of the circumstances," said Duncan Wood, the vice president of strategy at the Wilson Center. Mexican officials, Mr. Wood said, "know they can hurt the Biden administration, and they know that the Biden administration knows that."

Just this week, Mr. López Obrador skewered the American embargo on Cuba as "vile" and attacked the Biden administration for helping to fund Mexican media groups that he described as "opposition publications." (The president previously said that American financing for Mexican civil society amounts to "promoting a coup mentality.")

Vice President Kamala Harris met with Mr. López Obrador during her trip to Mexico over the summer and has since been seen as an internal keeper of that relationship. In her own meeting with Mr. López Obrador on Thursday, Ms. Harris spoke of their shared interest in history but also "the issue of our mutual concern about migration and what we will do as partners to address, in particular, the root causes of migration."

Mr. López Obrador, for his part, seized a moment during the meeting with Mr. Biden and Mr. Trudeau to warn of rising competition from China and the risks of a snarled global supply chain.

"The best, the most convenient thing, is to strengthen our economies, to strengthen our trade operations through North America and the entire continent," he said. "It is a paradox that so much money circulates throughout North America, and the ports of the Pacific are overwhelmed with merchandise from Asia."

	<p>Mr. López Obrador also said migration represented a “huge potential” to bolster the work forces of each country, and reminded Mr. Biden of his earlier commitment to find a way to offer a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented.</p> <p>“No president in the history of the United States has expressed as you have such a clear and certain commitment to improve the situation of the migrants,” Mr. López Obrador said through a translator. “I hope that you have the support of Congress and the members of both the Democrat and Republican parties.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Report: first Covid case at Wuhan market
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/health/covid-wuhan-market-lab-leak.html
GIST	<p>A scientist who has pored over public accounts of early Covid-19 cases in China reported on Thursday that an influential World Health Organization inquiry had most likely gotten the early chronology of the pandemic wrong. The new analysis suggests that the first known patient sickened with the coronavirus was a vendor in a large Wuhan animal market, not an accountant who lived many miles from it.</p> <p>The report, published on Thursday in the prestigious journal Science, will revive, though certainly not settle, the debate over whether the pandemic started with a spillover from wildlife sold at the market, a leak from a Wuhan virology lab or some other way. The search for the origins of the greatest public health catastrophe in a century has fueled geopolitical battles, with few new facts emerging in recent months to resolve the question.</p> <p>The scientist, Michael Worobey, a leading expert in tracing the evolution of viruses at the University of Arizona, came upon timeline discrepancies by combing through what had already been made public in medical journals, as well as video interviews in a Chinese news outlet with people believed to have the first two documented infections.</p> <p>Dr. Worobey argues that the vendor’s ties to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, as well as a new analysis of the earliest hospitalized patients’ connections to the market, strongly suggest that the pandemic began there.</p> <p>“In this city of 11 million people, half of the early cases are linked to a place that’s the size of a soccer field,” Dr. Worobey said. “It becomes very difficult to explain that pattern if the outbreak didn’t start at the market.”</p> <p>Several experts, including one of the pandemic investigators chosen by the W.H.O., said that Dr. Worobey’s detective work was sound and that the first known case of Covid was most likely a seafood vendor.</p> <p>But some of them also said the evidence was still insufficient to decisively settle the larger question of how the pandemic began. They suggested that the virus probably infected a “patient zero” sometime before the vendor’s case and then reached critical mass to spread widely at the market. Studies of changes in the virus’s genome — including one done by Dr. Worobey himself — have suggested that the first infection happened in roughly mid-November 2019, weeks before the vendor got sick.</p> <p>“I don’t disagree with the analysis,” said Jesse Bloom, a virologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. “But I don’t agree that any of the data are strong enough or complete enough to say anything very confidently, other than that the Huanan Seafood Market was clearly a super-spreading event.”</p> <p>Dr. Bloom also noted that this was not the first time the W.H.O. report, done in collaboration with Chinese researchers, was found to contain mistakes, including errors involving early patients’ potential links to the market.</p>

“It’s just kind of mind-boggling that in all of these cases, there keep being inconsistencies about when this happened,” he said.

‘The Mistake Lies There’

Toward the end of December 2019, doctors at several Wuhan hospitals noticed mysterious cases of pneumonia arising in people who worked at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, a [dank and poorly ventilated space](#) where seafood, poultry, meat and wild animals were sold. On Dec. 30, public health officials told hospitals to report any new cases linked to the market.

Fearing a replay of SARS, which [emerged](#) from Chinese animal markets in 2002, Chinese officials ordered the Huanan market closed, and Wuhan police officers [shut it down](#) on Jan. 1, 2020. Despite those measures, new cases multiplied through Wuhan.

Wuhan authorities [said](#) on Jan. 11, 2020, that cases had begun on Dec. 8. In February, they [identified](#) the earliest patient as a Wuhan resident with the surname Chen, who fell sick on Dec. 8 and had no link to the market.

Chinese officials and some outside experts suspected that the initially high percentage of cases linked to the market might have been a statistical fluke known as ascertainment bias. They reasoned that the Dec. 30 call from officials to report market-linked illnesses may have led doctors to overlook other cases with no such ties.

“At the beginning, we presumed that the seafood market may have the novel coronavirus,” Gao Fu, director of China’s Center for Disease Control and Prevention, [said in May 2020](#), according to China Global Television Network. “But it now turns out that the market is one of the victims.”

By the spring of 2020, [senior members](#) of the Trump administration were [promoting](#) another scenario for the origin of the pandemic: that the virus had escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which has a campus roughly eight miles away from the Huanan market, across the Yangtze River.

In January of this year, researchers chosen by the W.H.O. visited China and interviewed an accountant who had reportedly developed symptoms on Dec. 8. Their influential [March 2021 report](#) described him as the first known case.

But Peter Daszak, a disease ecologist at EcoHealth Alliance who was part of the W.H.O. team, said that he was convinced by Dr. Worobey’s analysis that they had been wrong.

“That December the eighth date was a mistake,” Dr. Daszak said.

The W.H.O. team never asked the accountant the date his symptoms began, he said. Instead, they were given the Dec. 8 date by doctors from Hubei Xinhua Hospital, who handled other early cases but did not care for Mr. Chen. “So the mistake lies there,” Dr. Daszak said.

For the W.H.O. experts, Dr. Daszak said, the interview was a dead end: The accountant had no apparent links to an animal market, lab or a mass gathering. He told them he liked spending time on the internet and jogging, and he did not travel much. “He was as vanilla as you could get,” Dr. Daszak said.

Had the team identified the seafood vendor as the first known case, Dr. Daszak said, it would have more aggressively pursued questions like what stall she worked in and where her products came from.

This year, Dr. Daszak has been one of the strongest critics of the [lab-leak theory](#). He and his organization, EcoHealth Alliance, have taken heat for research collaborations with the Wuhan Institute of Virology. [Last month](#), the National Institutes of Health said EcoHealth was in breach of the terms and conditions of its grant for research on coronaviruses in bats.

While the doctors at Hubei Xinhua Hospital said that the onset of the accountant's illness had been Dec. 8, a senior doctor at Wuhan Central Hospital, where Mr. Chen was treated, had [told a Chinese news outlet](#) that he developed symptoms around Dec. 16.

Asked about Mr. Chen's case, China's National Health Commission said it stood by comments made by Liang Wannian, the leader of the Chinese side of the W.H.O.-China investigation who led the interview with the Hubei Xinhua Hospital doctors. Mr. Liang told a [news conference in February](#) of this year that the earliest Covid case showed symptoms on Dec. 8 and was "not connected" to the Huanan market.

Errors and Inconsistencies

In their [report](#), the W.H.O. experts [concluded](#) that the virus most likely spread to people from an animal spillover, but they could not confirm that the Huanan market was the source. By contrast, they said that a lab leak was "extremely unlikely."

The report has come under fire for several errors and shortcomings. The Washington Post [revealed](#) in July that the report listed the wrong viral samples for several early patients — including the first official case — and mistakenly linked the first family cluster of cases to the Huanan market. The W.H.O. promised to fix the errors, but they remain in the report on the organization's website. (The organization said that it would ask the report's authors if and how they would correct the mistakes.)

In May, two months after the report by the W.H.O. and China was published, [18 prominent scientists](#), including Dr. Worobey, responded with a letter in Science complaining that the W.H.O. team had given the lab-leak theory short shrift. Far more research was required, they argued, to determine whether one explanation was more likely than the other.

An expert on the origins of [influenza](#) and [H.I.V.](#), Dr. Worobey has tried to piece together the early days of the Covid pandemic. Reading a [May 2020 study](#) of early cases written by local doctors and health officials in Wuhan, he was puzzled to see a description that seemed like Mr. Chen: a 41-year-old man with no contact with the Huanan market. But the study's authors dated his symptoms to Dec. 16, not Dec. 8.

Then Dr. Worobey found what appeared to be a second, independent source for the later date: Mr. Chen himself.

"I got a fever on the 16th, during the day," a man identified as Mr. Chen said in [a March 2020 video interview](#) with [The Paper](#), a publication based in Shanghai. The video indicates that Mr. Chen is a 41-year-old who worked in a company's finance office and never went to the Huanan market. [Official reports](#) said that he lived in the Wuchang district in Wuhan, miles from the market.

The New York Times was not able to independently confirm the identity of the man in the video.

Along with his fever on Dec. 16, Mr. Chen said he felt a tightness in his chest and went to the hospital that day. "Even without any strenuous exercise, with just a tiny bit of effort, like the way I'm speaking with you now, I'd feel short of breath," he said.

Dr. Worobey said that the medical records shown in the video might hold clues to how the W.H.O.-China report wound up with the wrong date. One page described surgery Mr. Chen needed to have teeth removed. Another was a Dec. 9 prescription for antibiotics referring to a fever from the day before — possibly the day of the dental surgery.

On the video, Mr. Chen speculated that he might have gotten Covid "when I went to the hospital" — possibly a reference to his earlier dental surgery.

The Washington Post [noted](#) in July that the details provided by the W.H.O. for the Dec. 8 case seemed to fit better with an [entry](#) from an online database of viral samples linked to someone who got sick on Dec. 16. In response, the W.H.O. had said it was looking into the discrepancy.

An agency spokesman told The New York Times it would be “difficult to comment” on the first known case because the W.H.O. team had limited access to health data. He said it was important for investigators to keep looking for patients infected even earlier.

Murky Links

In Dr. Worobey’s revised chronology, the earliest case is not Mr. Chen but the seafood vendor, a woman named Wei Guixian, who developed symptoms around Dec. 11. (Ms. Wei said in the same video published by The Paper that her serious symptoms began on Dec. 11, and she told [The Wall Street Journal](#) that she began feeling sick on Dec. 10. The W.H.O.-China report listed a Dec. 11 case linked to the market.)

Dr. Worobey found that hospitals reported more than a dozen likely cases before Dec. 30, the day the Wuhan authorities alerted doctors to be on the lookout for ties to the market.

He determined that Wuhan Central Hospital and Hubei Xinhua Hospital each recognized seven cases of unexplained pneumonia before Dec. 30 that would be confirmed as Covid-19. At each hospital, four out of seven cases were linked to the market.

By focusing on just these cases, Dr. Worobey argued, he could rule out the possibility that ascertainment bias skewed the results in favor of the market.

Still, other scientists said it’s far from certain that the pandemic began at the market.

“He has done an excellent job of reconstructing what he can from the available data, and it’s as reasonable a hypothesis as any,” said Dr. W. Ian Lipkin, a virologist at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. “But I don’t think we’re ever going to know what’s going on, because it’s two years ago and it’s still murky.”

Alina Chan, a postdoctoral fellow at the Broad Institute in Cambridge, Mass., and one of the most [vocal proponents](#) of investigating a lab leak, said that only new details about earlier cases — going back to November — would help scientists trace the origin.

“The main issue this points out,” she said, “is that there’s a lack of access to data, and there are errors in the W.H.O.-China report.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Army to NG if resist vax prepare for discipline
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/18/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#national-guard-army-vaccine
GIST	<p>The secretary of the Army has issued a memo warning the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in its National Guard that if they decline to get vaccinated against the coronavirus, they may not be renewed in the guard.</p> <p>“I have determined that all soldiers who refuse the mandatory vaccination order will be flagged,” wrote Christine E. Wormuth, the secretary, in a memo this week, which would prevent them from promotions, awards, bonuses and the like. If troops persist in declining, they will not be permitted “continued service” unless granted an approved exemption from the vaccine, she wrote.</p> <p>Last week, Oklahoma’s newly appointed adjutant general for the National Guard, Brig. Gen. Thomas H. Mancino, announced on behalf of Gov. Kevin Stitt that guardsmen in the state would not be required to get a Covid-19 vaccine. The policy defies a Pentagon directive issued in August that makes vaccination mandatory for all troops, including the National Guard, by deadlines set by each service branch.</p>

The memo created a testy stand off between Oklahoma officials and the Pentagon, which insists that all National Guard members must follow the same vaccine procedures as active duty troops. Guard troops are under the authority of the governor unless federally deployed. However, the Pentagon has stood its ground on the notion that its vaccine mandate trumps states' rights.

In Oklahoma, 89 percent of airmen in the Guard have been vaccinated, while only 40 percent of Army guardsmen have had shots; the deadline for members of the Army National Guard is coming next month. All branches of the military have been permitted to come up with their own vaccine mandate deadlines for active duty and guard troops, as well as their own punishment systems for refusing shots.

The Pentagon has been wary that other states may follow Oklahoma's lead.

Texas Guard officials, for instance, said in an email that the Pentagon appeared to be imposing vaccine mandates on military and National Guard members without adequate protections in place for individuals with religious objections and hinted it, too, might permit members to skip the shots.

The governor of Alaska, Mike Dunleavy, has also issued a memo noting that "President Biden and his Administration have taken actions, or announced plans to act, that threaten the sovereign authority of the State of Alaska," which included "imposing vaccine mandates on military and National Guard members without adequate protections in place for individuals with religious objections."

In essence, Texas and Alaska appear to be engaged in a passive version of the Oklahoma written policy.

"We are awaiting additional guidance from the Departments of the U.S. Army and Air Force that addresses National Guard requirements," said Candis Olmstead, a spokeswoman for the Alaska Guard, in an email.

So far, the Defense Department has granted a smattering of exemptions from vaccines, including for people who were already leaving the military or who have medical issues, but those for religious reasons are still pending.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Greece adds restrictions for unvaccinated
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/18/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#greece-covid-cases-vaccines
GIST	<p>Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece announced additional restrictions for the country's unvaccinated population on Thursday, a bid to keep a recent spike of coronavirus infections from increasing further.</p> <p>As of next Monday, access to more indoor spaces will be limited to the vaccinated, he said during a televised address. Proof of a negative test will no longer be sufficient for unvaccinated people to enter cinemas, theaters, museums and gymnasiums, he said. The new restrictions broaden those imposed in mid-September, which barred the unvaccinated from the indoor areas of cafes and restaurants.</p> <p>To increase demand for booster shots, Mr. Mitsotakis also said that the vaccination certificates of those over 60 would expire after seven months. Greece opened eligibility for booster shots last week for all those over 18 who had their last shot at least five and a half months ago. Those who got the Pfizer, AstraZeneca or Moderna vaccines initially were advised to get a Pfizer or Moderna booster. Those who received the Johnson & Johnson shot were advised to get Pfizer, Moderna or a second Johnson & Johnson shot as a booster.</p> <p>Mr. Mitsotakis appealed to all, particularly the unvaccinated elderly, to get their shots without delay. "Greece is mourning unnecessary losses as it very simply does not have the vaccination rates of other European countries," he said.</p>

About 61 percent of Greeks are fully vaccinated, below the average rate in the European Union of 65.4 percent, according to [the vaccine tracker of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#). Since the end of September, new daily cases have shot up from an average of about 2,100 to more than 6,500, [according to the Our World in Data project](#) at Oxford University, and daily Covid deaths have spiked over the same period, going from an average of around 30 to more than 74.

With Europe as a whole experiencing a sustained wave of cases, the sharp restrictions in Greece have been matched or surpassed by other E.U. nations. Austria, for instance, will impose full lockdowns in two states — Salzburg and Upper Austria — next week, after having imposed [broad restrictions on the activities of unvaccinated people](#).

On Thursday, lawmakers in Germany's Parliament approved a bill whose measures include a rule that only people who are vaccinated against the virus, have recovered from an infection or test negative can ride public transit or attend work in person. [The measure is expected to be passed by all 16 states on Friday.](#)

France and Italy have allowed people to enter indoor areas such as cafes, museums and gyms with a health pass that shows the holder has been vaccinated, has recovered from Covid-19 or has tested negative for the virus. However, both countries are reportedly considering restricting access to such areas to the vaccinated.

[The Czech Republic](#), which is experiencing some of its highest caseloads since the pandemic began, will bar people without a vaccination pass or proof of a previous Covid infection from restaurants, bars and hair salons as of Monday. They will also be barred from attending large events.

And lawmakers in the Netherlands, which is reporting record case numbers and sharply rising positive tests, recently restored mask mandates in some public indoor places and instituted a [three-week partial lockdown](#) that includes earlier closing hours for restaurants, bars and shops. However, the Dutch government has [resisted urgings to close schools](#), despite significant outbreaks among those aged 4 through 12.

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HEADLINE	11/18 More states expand booster shot access
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/18/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#massachusetts-boosters-adults
GIST	<p>Utah and Massachusetts on Thursday joined a growing number of states in broadening access to coronavirus vaccine boosters for all adults, just as federal regulators consider granting requests for Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna boosters to be authorized for all adults as early as this week, according to people familiar with the planning.</p> <p>The administration of Gov. Charlie Baker announced that all Massachusetts residents ages 18 and older could get a booster, if they met the federal timing rules: six months after receiving the second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or two months past getting the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.</p> <p>At a news conference on Thursday, Gov. Spencer J. Cox of Utah asked all health care providers to provide boosters to “any adult in the state of Utah who would like to receive a booster” beginning on Friday, in accordance with the same federal guidelines that Massachusetts was using.</p> <p>While federal regulators have signed off on boosters for only certain categories of people, some states have used a range of justifications to expand access, including heightened risks posed by holiday gatherings and the pervasive spread of the virus.</p> <p>In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont encouraged vaccinated adults to get a booster provided they meet timing rules, even if they might not appear to fit into federal eligibility categories.</p>

“C.D.C. speaks Latin, I can’t figure out who’s eligible, who’s not eligible,” said Mr. Lamont at a news conference on Thursday, referring to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “If you smoked while you were in high school back in the 1970s, you’re eligible. I think if you haven’t been vaccinated in more than six months, now’s the time to get the booster. Self report, you’re at risk or public facing, you’re out there, get the booster.”

The moves came as [Kansas, Kentucky, Maine and Vermont](#) also moved to expand access to boosters, following several other states and New York City.

The director of Rhode Island’s department of health, Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, announced on Tuesday that all adults could get a booster if they were past the federal timing rules. “Winter’s coming, our cases have gone up and everyone 18 and older is at higher risk of exposure. And so we want the message to go out that you can go ahead and get your booster shots,” she said at a news conference.

On Thursday, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said the administration would “wait for the process to proceed” at the federal level. She also encouraged people already eligible according to federal categories to get a booster for extra protection ahead of the holiday season when people may be traveling more and gathering inside because of colder weather.

Currently, federal regulators say people who received two doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines, meet timing rules, and are 65 or older, or adults who are considered to be at special risk because of their medical conditions, jobs or living environments are eligible for boosters. Anyone who received the Johnson & Johnson shot can already get a booster two months after the first shot. Eligible people can select from any of three vaccine brands as a booster.

A growing body of global research has shown that the vaccines available in the United States have [remained highly protective against the disease’s worst outcomes over time](#), even during the summer surge of the highly transmissible Delta variant. And there has been [an ongoing debate among experts](#) over whether extra shots [are necessary for younger, healthy adults](#).

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HEADLINE	11/18 India to repeal contentious farm laws
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/world/asia/india-farmers-modi.html
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India announced Friday that his government would repeal contentious farm laws aimed at overhauling the country’s struggling agriculture sector, in a surprise concession to yearlong protests by angry farmers.</p> <p>“We have decided to repeal all three farm laws, and will begin the procedure at the Parliament session that begins this month,” Mr. Modi said in a televised address. “I urge the protesting farmers to return home to their families, and let’s start afresh.”</p> <p>Protest leaders greeted Mr. Modi’s turnaround with cautious optimism, with plans to meet in New Delhi to discuss next steps.</p> <p>Many of the protesters come from India’s minority Sikh community, and Mr. Modi timed his announcement for Guru Nanak Jayanti, a holiday celebrated by Sikhs all over the world.</p> <p>Ramandeep Singh Mann, a farmer leader and activist, said he was “ecstatic” after hearing the news. “Like you’ve conquered Mount Everest!” he said.</p> <p>What remains unclear, Mr. Mann said, is whether the government will agree to the farmers’ other major demand: a separate law guaranteeing a minimum price for crops.</p> <p>For now, he said, farmers would continue their siege outside the borders of New Delhi until Parliament formally repealed the three laws.</p>

“Until that day, we will be there,” he said.

Mr. Modi’s government had stood firmly behind [the market-friendly](#) laws it passed last year, even as the farmers refused any compromise short of repealing them. The protesters [remained in their tents](#) through last year’s harsh winter, the summer heat and a deadly Covid-19 wave that caused havoc in New Delhi.

Mr. Modi’s government had argued that the new laws [would bring private investment](#) into a sector that more than 60 percent of India’s population still depends on for their livelihood — but has been lagging in its contribution to India’s economy.

But the farmers, already struggling under heavy debt loads and bankruptcies, feared that reduced government regulations would leave them at the mercy of corporate giants.

The repeal of the laws comes as Mr. Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party revs up its campaign in an upcoming election in the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand, where many of the protesting farmers live.

After more than a dozen rounds of failed negotiations, farmers changed tactics this fall, shadowing top officials of Mr. Modi’s government as they traveled and campaigned across northern India, ensuring their grievances would be hard to ignore.

During one such confrontation in October, a B.J.P. convoy [rammed into a group of protesting farmers](#) in Uttar Pradesh, killing four protesters along with four other people, including a local journalist. The son of one of Mr. Modi’s ministers is among those under investigation for murder in the episode.

Jagdeep Singh, whose father, Nakshatra Singh, 54, was among those killed, said the decision to repeal the laws served as homage to those who had died in the difficult conditions of a year of protests — whether from exposure to extreme temperatures, heart attacks, Covid or more. According to one farm leader, some 750 protesters have died. (The government says it does not have data on this.)

“This is a win for all those farmers who laid down their lives to save hundreds of thousands of poor farmers of this country from corporate greed,” Mr. Singh said. “They must be smiling from wherever they are.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Vancouver B.C. cutoff by road, rail: storms
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/vancouver-b-c-is-cut-off-by-road-rail-after-extraordinary-storms/
GIST	<p>Vancouver, Canada’s third-largest city, is cut off from the rest of the country by land after days of storms caused flooding and mudslides that have blocked major highways and rail lines.</p> <p>In response to what local officials are calling the storm of the century, British Columbia declared a state of emergency on Wednesday that will allow it, if necessary, to prohibit nonessential travel, hoarding of goods, and price gouging.</p> <p>“These are extraordinary events not measured before, not contemplated before,” Premier John Horgan told reporters, saying that the volume of rain that fell on Merritt, a town of 7,000 people northeast of Vancouver, was three times the historical high.</p> <p>The deluge left the Port of Vancouver, Canada’s largest port, stranded without access to trucks and rail cars to get goods in and out of the region. Water and landslides have blocked the tracks of the nation’s two major railways and washed away parts of the main east-west road artery, the Trans-Canada Highway.</p> <p>With all three major highways through the province’s interior shut, panic buying has set in.</p>

“Everyone, realizing that all the highways are cut off for the next little while, basically cleared out the grocery stores,” Stephen Way, a resident of Kamloops, about 280 miles northeast of Vancouver, said by phone. “It’s just like the beginning of the COVID pandemic. Everything is gone from toilet paper to fresh produce to meat.”

Grocery chain Sobeys Inc. said all shipments in and out of the Vancouver region are on hold due to current road conditions and asked customers to “maintain their regular shopping habits.” Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth said the government is monitoring reports of gasoline stations running out of fuel.

Horgan warned residents against hoarding. “You do not need 48 eggs, a dozen will do,” he said at a news conference.

It’s the second time in less than five months that British Columbia — a major conduit to Asian markets and home to one of the busiest ports on the West Coast — has been paralyzed by extreme weather.

The impact “is expected to be significant and will have a cascading effect,” says Wade Sobkowich, executive director of the Western Grain Elevator Association. There will be vessel delays at a time when freight rates and demurrage are already high because of supply chain logjams, he said. The association represents major shippers including Viterro Inc. and Richardson International.

More than 1,500 rail cars carrying grain are estimated to be idled in the Vancouver corridor, up sharply from 947 the prior day, Ag Transport Coalition data show.

“The picture looks bleak for the coming days,” Ag Transport said in a report Wednesday.

Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd. and Canadian National Railway Co. are still completing their inspections and haven’t identified when they might be able to bring lines back into operation.

The Trans Mountain pipeline, which carries oil from Alberta to the Vancouver area and onward to refineries in Washington state, was shut on Sunday due to rain. Teams are working on restart plans for the pipeline and finished “initial assessment of the affected areas by air” on Tuesday, the company said in a release.

“It has been a year of insane weather whiplash for Canada,” said Jeff Masters, meteorologist for Yale Climate Connections.

Some of the worst flooding has been near the town of Lytton, which grabbed global headlines in June when it burned to the ground after recording the highest temperature ever in Canada — 121 degrees Fahrenheit.

Summer wildfires almost certainly raised the threat of floods for the region, Masters said. The burn-scarred Earth lets water run freely and raises the risk of flowing mud and debris, which can cause even more damage. This year’s heat waves, which scientists say couldn’t have reached records without climate change, raised the risk of fires.

So this creates a situation where the flooding was likely made worse by last summer’s climate troubles, he said. “When you want to talk attribution, it is not just the event that is going on but the event that preceded it.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Belarus clears migrant camps at border
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/more-migrants-try-enter-poland-belarus-east-west-standoff-2021-11-18/

BRUZGI, Belarus, Nov 18 (Reuters) - Belarus authorities on Thursday cleared the main camps where migrants had huddled at the border with Poland, in what could potentially be a turning point in a crisis that has spiralled in recent weeks into a major East-West confrontation.

European countries have for months accused Belarus of having deliberately created the crisis by flying in migrants from the Middle East and pushing them to attempt to illegally cross its borders illegally into Poland and Lithuania.

Minsk, backed by Moscow, rejected those accusations in a stand-off that had left thousands of migrants trapped in freezing woods at the border.

In a cruel sign of the harsh conditions there, a couple, both injured, told the Polish Centre for International Aid, an NGO, early on Thursday that their one-year-old child had died in the forest. At least eight more people are believed to have died at the border in recent months.

A spokesperson for the Polish border guards said the camps on the border in western Belarus were completely empty, which a Belarusian press officer confirmed. Belarus state news agency Belta said the migrants had been brought to a warehouse in Belarus away from the frontier.

"These camps are now empty, the migrants have been taken most likely to the transport-logistics, centre which is not far from the Bruzgi border crossing," the Polish spokesperson said.

"There were no other such camps ... but there were groups appearing in other places trying to cross the border. We'll see what happens in the next hours," the spokesperson said, adding a word of caution. "There are still some people around, but it's clearly emptying out."

In recent weeks, migrants have tried, mostly at night, to cross the frontier and have sometimes clashed with Polish troops at the border.

PRESSURE

The move to clear the camps came during a week of intensified diplomacy. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke by telephone twice in three days the Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, normally shunned by European leaders.

And Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday called on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko to start a dialogue with his opponents, who however swiftly poured cold water on the idea unless Lukashenko freed political prisoners first.

Belarus said earlier on Thursday that Lukashenko had proposed a plan to Merkel to resolve the crisis, under which the EU would take in 2,000 people while Minsk would send another 5,000 back home.

But German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer rejected the proposal and talked of misinformation, in a sign that Minsk's moves had not removed all the tensions of the past months.

"If we took in refugees, if we bowed to the pressure and said 'we are taking refugees into European countries', then this would mean implementing the very basis of this perfidious strategy", Seehofer said during a news conference in Warsaw.

A German government source added that Germany had not agreed to any deal with Lukashenko, stressing that this was a European problem in which Germany was not acting alone.

Shortly before the plan was announced, the European Commission had said there could be no negotiation with Belarus over the plight of the migrants.

And Poland's Interior Ministry said that it could shut down rail transport at the Kuznica border crossing point with Belarus unless the Belarusian authorities stabilised the situation at the border, in another sign or lingering tensions.

'HORRORS'

But earlier on Thursday, in what was potentially another sign of easing of the crisis, hundreds of Iraqis checked in at a Minsk airport for flight back to Iraq, the first repatriation flight since August.

Large numbers of Iraqis are among those who have camped at Belarus's borders, seeking entry and a better life in the prosperous 27-nation EU. Some 430, mostly Iraqi Kurds, checked in for a flight back to Iraq from Minsk on Thursday, the Iraqi foreign ministry said.

There had been no other such flights since about 1,000 Iraqis were evacuated from Minsk in August, a spokesperson for Iraqi Airways, Hussein Jalil, told Reuters.

"I would not go back if it wasn't for my wife," a 30-year-old Iraqi Kurd, who declined to give his name, told Reuters on the eve of the evacuation flight. "She does not want to go back with me to the border, because she saw too many horrors over there." The couple attempted to cross at least eight times from Belarus to Lithuania and Poland.

Meanwhile, Belarusian state airline Belavia has stopped allowing citizens from Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Yemen to board flights from Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent to Minsk, Belta reported.

The EU has launched a diplomatic effort to ease the crisis by putting pressure on regional countries not to allow migrants to board flights for Belarus.

An African migrant whose identity was unknown was buried on Thursday at a Muslim cemetery in Bohoniki, in north-east Poland, near Belarus, the second migrant funeral there this week.

"It is hard," said Maciej Szczesnowicz, a leader of the local Tatar Muslim community. "It pains me that people went to another country... and met such a fate here in Poland."

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HEADLINE	11/18 More CEOs join 'Great Resignation'
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/more-chief-executives-join-great-resignation-2021-11-18/
GIST	<p>Nov 18 (Reuters) - CEO turnover spiked in the first half of 2021, as companies tapped new talent to navigate the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed-out chief executives sought a career change, a study from recruiting firm Heidrick & Struggles found.</p> <p>The findings illustrate how CEOs are not immune to the exhaustion that has swept hundreds of millions of workers worldwide since the onset of the pandemic and has pushed many to consider a new job or lifestyle in a wave dubbed "The Great Resignation." read more</p> <p>"Our belief is that it will only accelerate going into next year as people have delayed their retirements," said Jeff Sanders, co-managing partner of Heidrick's global CEO and board practice.</p> <p>There were 103 CEO appointments in the first half of 2021 out of 1,095 companies in 24 regions that Heidrick studied, including the United States, China and some European countries.</p> <p>Six months prior, in the second half of 2020, 49 companies changed CEOs, according to the study.</p>

	<p>Most companies kept their leaders in place last year as they closed ranks to deal with the challenges of the pandemic. But as it receded with the help of vaccines, companies felt they were stable enough to find a new leader, Sanders said.</p> <p>"Many CEOs didn't have to travel as much," which helped them preserve their energy, Sanders said. But communicating "virtually" in a new medium was "exhausting," he said.</p> <p>The reluctance of many boards to meet CEO candidates physically or place risky bets on outsiders while the pandemic lingers favored internal applicants, the study found. Nearly two-thirds of new CEOs were internal candidates, up from just a little over half during the same period in 2020.</p> <p>Women made up 13% of the new CEOs in the first half of this year, up from 6% in the prior period in the regions the report studied.</p> <p>Yet the churn did not lead to big strides in diversity, according to the study. It found that 3% of Fortune 100 CEOs are Black, 4% are Hispanic or Latino, 4% are Asian and 1% are Middle Eastern or North African, less than their share of the U.S. population.</p> <p>"I don't think (CEO diversity) is where it needs to be," Sanders said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Firefighter trauma rises in West
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-wildfires-firefighter-ptsd/
GIST	<p>Cal Fire Battalion Chief Miguel Watson wakes to the wind whipping through the trees. The whole night is ahead of him. He lies there and then, feeling restless, gets up and walks to his pickup truck.</p> <p>He listens to the radio, and if he finds a fire in a neighboring district in California's Napa Valley, he'll head there. If he can't, he'll stay on the road until his mind settles. That's most nights now in the summer and fall.</p> <p>Watson counts among the traumatized firefighters battling the last decade's grueling blazes in the American West.</p> <p>He's responsible for three stations in his Northern California district for Cal Fire, the state agency that protects 31 million acres of wildlands across California and assists local governments with emergency services.</p> <p>Three years ago, he couldn't prevent a monumental wildfire from destroying his hometown, Paradise, California. Nothing has been the same for him since.</p> <p>In November 2018, Butte County, home to Paradise, was in the throes of drought and the winds were ripping when a malfunctioning power line sparked a fire that blew across the mountainous region. Eighteen days later, the fire had killed 85 people, charred 153,336 acres and razed more than 18,000 structures.</p> <p>The blaze became a symbol of the West's longer, more destructive wildfire seasons. According to the federal government, wildfires burned more than 10 million acres of land annually three times between 2015 and 2020, well above the last decade's national average of 6.8 million acres burned. In records dating back to the early 1960s, California counts 15 of its 20 most destructive wildfires as occurring in the last seven years.</p> <p>Watson, 45, started his life as a firefighter when he was 20 and worked his way up to be a fire captain in Paradise for Cal Fire. He called it his dream job. He said he loved battling a fire, sweating and covered in ash, dirt and dust as he dug trenches with a Pulaski ax to stop the flames.</p> <p>He felt part of his community: Paradise residents were more than customers – they were his neighbors.</p>

“I loved being there. I looked forward to it,” he said. “Then the Camp Fire happened.”

Paradise was practically obliterated. Almost every home burned. His brother’s home burned. His own childhood home burned.

“That fucked me up, for lack of a classy word,” Watson said.

Firefighting has never been a profession for the weak of heart. Those like Watson, employed year-round, can struggle to navigate their transition from wildfires to the steady rhythms of being on call for structural fires and emergencies. Wildland firefighters, who work on contract in fire season, can find themselves untethered and adrift in their off months from the job.

Climate change has ratcheted up the pressure: Firefighters face lengthier wildfire seasons, and the blazes, fueled by winds and drought, have devoured forests and rural communities.

Researchers have documented mental health struggles among both wildland and regular firefighters. A study by Florida State University researchers in 2015 reported that nearly half of all firefighters they surveyed said they had experienced suicidal thoughts. A follow-up study three years later found 55% of wildland firefighter respondents exhibited signs of suicide risk, in contrast to 32% of city and town-based firefighters.

New data shared with Reuters by Dr. Irva Hertz-Picciotto, director of the UC Davis Environmental Health Sciences Center, tracked 39 firefighters in the aftermath of massive wildfires in the Napa Valley and Sonoma County in 2017. She found they suffered high rates of depression and anxiety in the first five months after the fires. About 25% reported agitated behavior, 59% reported anxiety or stress, and one-third reported a depressed mood.

Mike Ming, the staff chief of Cal Fire’s Behavioral Health and Wellness Program, says his office is seeing more requests for help from firefighters related to trauma today than it ever has.

Ming, who narrowly averted death when flames trapped him in a canyon in 2017 as a wildfire ravaged his home county, Sonoma, believes the growth in requests is tied to the trust his program has built up with firefighters and “the intensity of what we’ve been seeing over the past three to five years.”

In 2014, the year before California witnessed a spike in fires, his program had 4,544 interactions with firefighters, in which his team conducted outreach or fielded calls related to mental health, substance abuse, family counseling, medical health and work-related issues; those contacts jumped to 11,136 in 2015; and soared to 18,976 in 2017. In 2018, the program had 14,922 contacts with firefighters; in 2019, a year that saw a less intense fire season, the numbers slipped to 8,455, before rising again in 2020 to 12,474 as the state confronted more fires.

Shawna Powell, one of the heads of peer support until she retired from Cal Fire in mid-September, sees the strain of longer, more damaging fire seasons.

“You put your heart and soul into trying to save a couple houses out there, and you watch them burn because of the wind and the fire,” Powell said. “You do that time after time, it’s a disheartening experience. You can’t unsee that.”

The U.S. Forest Service, which has more than 10,000 professional firefighters on its payroll, told Reuters it has begun overhauling its mental health services for wildland firefighters this year. It said it has hired a nationwide contractor for counseling that has “trauma trained clinicians” with experience working with law enforcement and firefighters.

The Forest Service said that the federal government needs to start developing an adequate mental health support system for wildland fighters. Until now, the service said, the government hadn't recognized the mental and emotional risks they faced.

"The increased length and intensity of fire seasons has certainly created an increased risk to the mental and emotional health of wildland firefighters," the Forest Service said in a written statement.

The Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance, a nonprofit group recognized by the firefighting community nationally as the most reliable tracker of suicides, shared with Reuters its data on wildland firefighter suicides. The alliance has tracked 50 suicides of wildland firefighters since 2008, with 34 of the deaths occurring since 2015. The highest concentration of suicides has been among firefighters in California, with 18 deaths, it said.

Jeff Dill, who runs the alliance, has conducted mental health training sessions for wildland and city firefighters for a decade. After returning to school for a counseling degree, which he received in 2010, he began consulting fire departments on setting up their own counseling programs and their chaplains and therapists on the difficulties firefighters faced.

He talked to departments about what he termed "a cultural brainwashing" inside the firefighting world, where people didn't share what they were going through. He'd lead classes where department chiefs and therapists and chaplains role-played scenarios of firefighters who were suicidal or depressed, struggling with addiction or battling post-traumatic stress disorder.

In 2017, he said, he took to the road conducting seminars around the country. He crossed California and Oregon and met wildland fighters who were suddenly battling wildfires that swept into towns. When he visited some of the stations, "men stood in front of me in tears and said, 'Look at this: Everything around us is burned.'"

Riva Duncan, a longtime U.S. Forest Service firefighter, also serves as executive secretary of the Grassroots Wildland Firefighters, an advocacy group for the profession. She said she saw more of her peers seek counseling last year after they witnessed fires that destroyed communities in Oregon.

Duncan, who served in the Forest Service for three decades, says she experienced her first panic attack about 10 years ago. Driving on the highway in Tennessee to see her mom, her heart started racing and she pulled over. She described it as the beginning of her grappling with the toll from her job.

Duncan started fighting wildland fires in the summer of 1994, when the fire crew she worked on in Pennsylvania was assigned to battle blazes out West, jumping from fire to fire in Washington and Idaho. Duncan loved the adventure.

But the strain of the work grew. In the 2000s, she worked as a deputy forest fire chief in the Klamath National Forest in Northern California. There, three colleagues died in road accidents, another three died in helicopter crashes, and a water truck ran over a female firefighter, crushing her to death as she slept in a sleeping bag.

Duncan sought a quieter job as a Forest Service officer in North Carolina, but eventually the memories and loss piled on. She found herself growing angry over little things, and then the panic attacks hit. Duncan sought a therapist who diagnosed her as suffering from PTSD.

Since seeking help for her PTSD in 2014, Duncan has spoken up publicly about mental health issues for firefighters. In September 2020, the Archie Creek fire in northern Oregon raged over 120,000 acres and destroyed 109 buildings. After the blaze, a fellow firefighter – struggling with a personal crisis – confessed to suicidal thoughts. She and her colleagues contacted a crisis team to provide him immediate counseling.

“These fires are just burning so crazy and so fast and so hot,” said Duncan, who retired as a full-time Forest Service employee in January and now works fires on a contract basis for the federal government in New Mexico. “There’s a sense of hopelessness.”

Certain memories stick with Watson from the first days of the Paradise blaze. Clouds of smoke blackened the horizon, and glowing red embers rained down; flames licked up trees.

As he and two other firefighters headed into town in his fire engine, he called his mom at her house in Paradise and told her, “Things are different; take whatever you can, and leave.” If he had known they would never see their family home again, he thinks, he would have told her to take more items: some photos of road trips and reunions; pictures of friends, cousins and grandmothers and great-aunts who have passed away. “Those are gone,” he said.

His body jolted at the sound of a car speeding by and the flash of a headlight that flickered in the darkness. He worried aloud: “We are going to kill someone.”

He and his two colleagues marched to a cul-du-sac through the amber haze. They started sawing and axing porches, patios, fences, tossing furniture and clearing leaves – removing anything flammable and heaving it away.

His bosses ordered his team to join fire crews trying to salvage the town’s hospital. He battled to save the maternity ward, where his three children were born. They tore down fencing and managed to protect the wing.

The next day, they drove through the town’s main roadways. Where there were once thick pine groves, now there were charred stumps, ash and smoldering ruins. Downed power lines and scorched metallic husks of vehicles littered the roadside. Only later did he learn that bodies lay in some of the cars. He expressed relief his crew didn’t discover the bodies, because it would have been “one more image you can’t scrape out of your brain.”

He drove to his mother’s house.

His childhood home was now an empty lot, strewn with metal beams, shattered concrete, dented sheet metal and the blasted-out frame of a corner wall where the laundry room had been. He recognized his mother’s woodstove, half-melted and flipped over.

“I just didn’t have the capacity to take it in. It was almost like you were dreaming, like, is this real; did this really happen?”

Watson spent the next month helping search for bodies. He and his team knew Paradise: where people lived, which places were nursing homes, retirement communities or places where handicapped people lived.

If there were corpses, Watson wanted to find them so that when Paradise reopened, he could spare people finding a dead relative. At the end of each day, his spirits deflated. Only once did he find any human remains.

In December, the incinerated town opened to the public. Watson went to work, but he couldn’t handle seeing his childhood community. He thought about the few houses they saved that first morning of the fire and all the buildings they passed in the smoke and flame that had been destroyed.

He’d stay inside his fire station, inspect equipment or sit in his office with the blinds drawn. He only went on fire calls at night so he didn’t have to look at Paradise. He became ashamed of himself and started looking to transfer.

Watson described himself as acting like “an absolute monster” at home with his wife and children, shouting at her for no reason.

In the spring of 2019, he transferred to Gridley at the southern end of Butte County, but it wasn’t far enough away. That July, Watson found a new job as a battalion chief in Cal Fire’s Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit, 105 miles away. He said, as part of their fresh slate, his wife wanted to leave California. Watson said he would do whatever she wanted. They found a home in Coeur D’Alene, Idaho, and he would commute to his Cal Fire unit.

After the transfer, he recalled, he had a 48-hour break from work that August and called his wife, excited to be coming home to spend time with his family. Instead, within 30 seconds, he said, he was shouting at his wife about her scheduling plans with their neighbors. He hung up the phone and realized something was seriously wrong and he couldn’t fix it alone. He rang Cal Fire.

Cal Fire arranged for Watson to attend a four-day retreat the next month with a therapist specialized in PTSD in Idaho. Driving to the course, Watson wanted to back out. At a gas station, Watson fantasized about being run over by a car in the parking lot. Then he’d be hospitalized and have a good excuse not to attend the retreat.

But he kept driving.

At the retreat, he met police officers, firefighters and first responders, people like him. There were around eight of them. They sat in sessions that lasted from morning until night – what Watson called “brain banging.” He said he learned that his brain was divided between a “rational” and “emotional” side. The therapists taught him that when his anger welled up, he could find his way back to his rational brain.

Today, Watson said, he is trying to be a loving human being at home and a model for his two sons and daughter. He worries that all he taught them is anger. He senses his wife is always bracing for his old “verbal jujitsu monster” to show up.

But Watson said he has tools to cope now. If he sees himself losing his temper, he asks for a few minutes to regain his composure.

“Hopefully, one day, I’ll get past it,” he said. “One day I’ll move on.”

Paradise calls him still. On his 45th birthday, six days before the third anniversary of the fire, he returned for a visit.

“I don’t know how to shake it,” he said. “Like I’m continuously drawn there, but it’s heartbreaking every time.”

He passed the street where he saved a dozen homes the first day of the fire and wondered who lives there now. He passed the main hospital building, which is still shuttered. He headed to his mother’s empty property; he wanted to be surrounded by his childhood birthday memories, but standing on the grounds, he couldn’t bear it.

“I just wanted to be home,” he said, searching for words to describe his ambivalence. “Maybe I just want to drive up there and just all of a sudden everything will just be the way it was.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 France, Germany: Russia broke protocol
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-says-russias-publication-notes-breaks-diplomatic-rules-2021-11-18/

GIST	<p>PARIS, Nov 18 (Reuters) - France and Germany accused Russia on Thursday of breaking diplomatic protocol after Moscow published their confidential correspondence over Ukraine, the latest sign of deteriorating ties between Moscow and the West.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Russian foreign ministry released a number of diplomatic letters it exchanged with Germany and France to try to show that its stance on talks over eastern Ukraine has been misrepresented.</p> <p>"We consider this approach to be contrary to diplomatic rules and customs," French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anne-Claire Legendre told reporters in a daily online briefing.</p> <p>Germany's Foreign Ministry spokesperson later issued a similar statement.</p> <p>The publication of the diplomatic correspondence came after Paris accused Russia of refusing to accept a ministerial meeting with France, Ukraine and Germany to discuss the pro-Russian separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine and denied that it had failed to respond to proposals made by Moscow.</p> <p>In a rare response, Russia published 28 pages of diplomatic documents, showing it had said in advance that foreign minister Sergei Lavrov could not take part in the proposed Nov. 11 meeting.</p> <p>However, the documents published also showed serious differences between Russia, France and Germany.</p> <p>Russia attached a draft statement on the "internal Ukrainian conflict" that Russia proposed to publish after the possible Normandy format meeting.</p> <p>The Normandy format brings together Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France to help end the conflict in eastern Ukraine between Kyiv's forces and pro-Russian separatists.</p> <p>On Nov. 4, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said in a joint letter to Lavrov that Moscow's draft had assessments that Germany and France did not share, such as the portrayal of an "internal Ukrainian conflict" among others.</p> <p>Two European diplomats said the publication by Moscow appeared to be an attempt to sow confusion, but that it had backfired because it proved that Moscow was trying to block the process by demanding numerous preconditions that would make any hope of holding a meeting impossible.</p> <p>Legendre called on Russia to return to the negotiating table and continue discussions, but in the "approved formats and according to agreed principles".</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Russia: West taking 'red lines' too lightly
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-west-not-taking-russias-warnings-red-lines-seriously-enough-2021-11-18/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Nov 18 (Reuters) - President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that the West was taking Russia's warnings not to cross its "red lines" too lightly and that Moscow needed serious security guarantees from the West.</p> <p>In a wide-ranging foreign policy speech, the Kremlin leader also described relations with the United States as "unsatisfactory" but said Russia remained open to dialogue with Washington.</p> <p>The Kremlin said in September that NATO would overstep a Russian red line if it expanded its military infrastructure in Ukraine, and Moscow has since accused Ukraine and NATO of destabilising behaviour, including in the Black Sea.</p> <p>In the televised speech, Putin complained that Western strategic bombers carrying "very serious weapons" were flying within 20 km (12.5 miles) of Russia's borders.</p>

"We're constantly voicing our concerns about this, talking about red lines, but we understand our partners - how shall I put it mildly - have a very superficial attitude to all our warnings and talk of red lines," Putin said.

NATO - with which Moscow severed ties last month - had destroyed all mechanisms for dialogue, Putin said.

He told foreign ministry officials that Russia needed to seek long-term guarantees of its security from the West, though he said this would be difficult and did not spell out what form the assurances should take.

Russia-West ties have been at post-Cold War lows for years, but the tone has sharpened in recent weeks as Ukraine and NATO countries have raised fears over Russian troop movements near Ukraine's borders and tried to guess Moscow's real intentions.

But despite a growing list of disputes, the Kremlin has maintained high-level contacts with Washington and spoken repeatedly of a possible summit between Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden to follow up their initial meeting in Geneva in June, which Putin said had opened up room for an improvement in ties.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted by RIA news agency as saying the two presidents could hold an online meeting before the end of the year.

Earlier, Peskov told reporters that Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan discussed cybersecurity, Ukraine and the migrant crisis on the Belarus border in a phone call on Wednesday.

He said the call was part of preparations for "high-level contact" between the presidents.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Study: 1/3 rd healthcare workers not vaxxed
SOURCE	https://www.forbes.com/sites/roberthart/2021/11/18/nearly-one-third-of-healthcare-workers-in-us-hospitals-are-still-not-vaccinated-against-covid-19-cdc-study-finds-as-vaccine-mandate-looms/?sh=394871c645e6
GIST	<p>Nearly one third of healthcare workers in U.S. hospitals are still not vaccinated against Covid-19, according to research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as tensions escalate over a looming—and contested—nationwide mandate that officials worry will leave the sector with a shortage of critical workers.</p> <p>KEY FACTS</p> <p>As of September 15, 70% of healthcare workers were fully vaccinated against Covid-19, according to the CDC study of more than 3 million personnel across more than 2,000 U.S. hospitals published in the <i>American Journal of Infection Control</i>.</p> <p>Rates varied based on the type of hospital, the researchers found, with the highest vaccination rates found in children's hospitals where 77% of workers have both doses.</p> <p>Critical access hospitals had the lowest vaccination rate, with 64% of workers fully vaccinated, the researchers found.</p> <p>Vaccination rates also differed by location, with healthcare staff in metropolitan counties (71%) having higher vaccination rates than those in rural counties (65%).</p> <p>Vaccine uptake also varied dramatically over time, the researchers found, jumping from 36% to 60% in the four months between January and April—a 24 point jump—but taking five months to reach 70% by September.</p>

Half of that jump (5%) in vaccination happened in the month between August and September, something the authors said could be due to the spread of the delta coronavirus variant or mandates in some jurisdictions.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Federal vaccine [mandates](#) come into force early next year. The rules—which will affect more than 17 million healthcare workers at facilities participating in Medicare and Medicaid—require workers to have received their final vaccine dose by January 4.

KEY BACKGROUND

Healthcare workers were among the very first in line for Covid-19 vaccines, a priority for both their occupational risk of infection and their increased risk of passing it on to others, especially vulnerable patients, in healthcare settings. Vaccination rates among different healthcare professionals vary—the American Medical Association [says](#) 96% of its practicing physicians have been fully vaccinated and government [data](#) indicates 73% of staff at long term facilities are. Individual providers, states and the federal government all now require vaccination of its healthcare workers. Facilities, some of which have [begun](#) to [fire](#) workers not complying with mandates, are growing increasingly concerned the requirements will trigger staffing shortages. The continued refusal of healthcare workers to get the jab has [frustrated](#) colleagues and officials, not least because most are already required to be vaccinated against a litany of other diseases in order to work. A number of states are [contesting](#) the vaccine mandates and the issue will ultimately be decided in the courts.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Europe: China pursues military-civilian tech
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/exclusive-monkey-brain-study-with-link-chinas-military-rolls-top-european-2021-11-18/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY/COPENHAGEN, Nov 18 (Reuters) - A Chinese professor at the University of Copenhagen conducted genetic research with the Chinese military without disclosing the connection, the university told Reuters, in the latest example of how China's pursuit of military-civilian technology is tapping into Western academia in the strategically sensitive area of biotechnology.</p> <p>The professor, Guojie Zhang, is also employed by Shenzhen-based genomics giant BGI Group, which funds dozens of researchers at the university and has its European headquarters on the university's campus.</p> <p>Zhang and a student he was supervising worked with a People's Liberation Army (PLA) laboratory on research exposing monkeys to extreme altitude to study their brains and develop new drugs to prevent brain damage – a priority the PLA has identified for Chinese troops operating on high plateau borders.</p> <p>Zhang co-published that paper with a PLA major general in January 2020. At the time the study was published, the university was "not familiar with the fact that the paper also included authors from Chinese military research institutions," Niels Kroer, head of its biology department, told Reuters in an email.</p> <p>Zhang confirmed that he did not inform the university of the link because the university didn't require researchers to report co-authors on scientific papers to it, which the university confirmed. BGI said the study with the PLA lab "was not carried out for military purposes" and brain research is a critical area for understanding human diseases. China's government science academy said the study had national defence and civilian benefits on the Tibetan plateau.</p> <p>Concerns about China's fusion of military and civilian technology, and about universities transferring sensitive technology to China that could help its military, have grown in the United States in recent years. Washington agreed last month to work with the European Union on the issue under a new joint technology and trade council. A U.S. Department of Defense report on China's military power this month flagged concern over Beijing using biotechnology to enhance its soldiers' performance.</p>

The Danish incident, reported here for the first time, shows how China's pursuit of biotechnology with a military use has also become an issue for universities in Europe.

The European Commission says it is developing guidelines on "tackling foreign interference" at higher education institutions; a 2020 [report](#) from the Leiden Asia Centre, an independent group affiliated with Leiden University in the Netherlands, found at least five countries in Europe had concerns about the risks of research collaboration with China. Some universities, including Copenhagen, have long had close science ties to China.

Copenhagen university and two large Danish foundations who funded some of Zhang's work said they discovered China's military was involved only after one of the foundations saw it had been credited, incorrectly, with financing the monkey study. The work was funded by the Chinese government and military, the paper said.

The discovery came as Denmark's intelligence agency, PET, [warned](#) Danish universities in May of the national security risks of being unwittingly involved in foreign military research, citing "a number of espionage activities and other foreign interference," and a student who co-authored research into 5G technology with an engineer from a Chinese military university. It declined to comment on specific cases.

The Chinese Academy of Science, where Zhang also has a genetics lab, [said](#) of the study at the time that brain damage and death caused by high altitude on the Tibetan plateau had severely hindered "national defence construction."

Denmark's Ministry of Higher Education and Science declined to comment on the altitude study, but said export control rules apply to some technology that can be used for both civilian and military purposes. The Danish Business Authority said most types of gene technology are not on its export control list.

The ministry said it had launched a broad review of the risks of international research cooperation, led by top university heads, to conclude at the start of next year.

The University of Copenhagen expects the review of "ethical and security policy limits" for collaboration will result in new rules for universities - and greater focus on the risks, its deputy director for research and innovation Kim Brinckmann told Reuters in an email.

"We are very proud to have Prof. Zhang ... as one of our very highly performing researchers," he said. The university did not respond to a question about how much funding BGI provides it.

China's foreign ministry said it urged Danish institutions to "abandon ideological prejudice and end groundless accusations and smears," and treat their research cooperation rationally "to accrue positive energy in the development of bilateral relations and practical cooperation."

ALTITUDE

Zhang and the head of the PLA laboratory for high-altitude research, Major General Yuqi Gao, designed the study, which also lists BGI founders Wang Jian and Yang Huanming as co-authors. BGI's other joint research with Gao has involved soldiers in Tibet and Xinjiang, Reuters reported in January.

That report was cited by two U.S. senators who called in September for BGI to be sanctioned by the United States as a military-linked company. Gao's research has directly improved the ability of China's rapid-advance plateau troops to carry out training and combat missions, according to the Chinese military's [official news service](#).

China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences launched a four-year plan in 2012 for troops to acclimatise and adapt to the low-oxygen Tibetan plateau. That plan said BGI was working with Gao's lab to test soldiers arriving in Tibet and identify genes linked to altitude sickness, which does not affect Tibetans. It said preventing altitude sickness helped to "manage border areas where ethnic minorities gather," and had far-reaching economic and political significance.

BGI told Reuters the research with the military university aimed to understand the health risk for all people travelling to and working at high altitude.

"The project using BGI's technology studied the changes of the pathophysiology and genomics of the human body at very high altitudes," a BGI spokesman said. "In China, many military institutions ... carry out both civilian and military research," he added.

Gao [wrote](#) in 2018 that high altitude disease "is the main reason for reduced combat effectiveness and health damage of soldiers at high altitudes and influences the results of war on the highland plateau," and noted that drugs could be used in an emergency for the rapid deployment of soldiers.

China's military has recently [increased](#) live fire drills in Tibet after border clashes with India.

DEEP TIES

The University of Copenhagen has one of Europe's oldest genetics institutes, and it is BGI's biggest international research partner by count of science papers.

The ties run deep. Two former BGI chief executives, BGI's chairman, and the founder of its animal cloning programme previously studied or worked at Copenhagen. The university hosts more than two dozen BGI-funded researchers undertaking science and health doctorates.

Biology head Kroer told Reuters the university had been unaware of "claims that BGI has connections with the PLA." The university said that other than Zhang's salary as a professor, no Danish money was spent on the study, which animal rights activists have [argued](#) subjected the animals to suffering and distress.

The student Zhang worked with was in China and employed by BGI, the university said. Zhang's research team was not involved in the animal experiments performed in China, but did analyse the genomic data generated from the experiments, it added.

The Lundbeck Foundation, which primarily funds brain research and was incorrectly listed as a funder of the monkey brain study, "has not supported this area of his research, nor do we have any knowledge about it," a spokesman said of the monkey brain project. Lundbeck said Zhang had told them he was studying [ants and genetics](#) and how this could explain brain processes in humans.

The foundation said it asked Zhang this year to remove its name from the study. The Carlsberg Foundation, which controls the world's third-largest brewer and said it gave Zhang a DKK 4 million (\$623,000) fellowship in 2016, also told Reuters it had been incorrectly listed as funding the project.

The paper was published in a Chinese journal, Zoological Research, which declined to comment.

Zhang is on the journal's editorial board. He told Reuters the two Danish foundations were mentioned in the paper by mistake. "We did not spend any funding from the grants I received from these two foundations on this project," he added in an email. The journal published a correction removing the foundations' names in March 2021.

Lundbeck declined to comment on what impact the discovery might have; Carlsberg has said animal experiments conducted overseas must comply with Danish regulations, but did not comment on the military involvement.

INTERNAL DEBATE

In June 2020, the University of Copenhagen decided to close a think tank it had run with Shanghai's Fudan University since 2013, saying it had adjusted its overall cooperation strategy.

	<p>The decision prompted a debate about China inside the university, documents obtained by Reuters under freedom of information rules show. The university held a meeting in August 2020 to discuss the closure of Fudan and review its collaboration with China.</p> <p>"China has engaged in a strategic civil-military fusion of research that often blurs the lines to the outsider," China Studies professor Jorgen Delman said in a note to the university's head afterwards, recommending better screening of Chinese researchers and consultations with Danish military intelligence to advise on "risks and no-go areas." He declined to comment further.</p> <p>Genetic cloning technology was transferred to BGI after a researcher, Yutao Du, received her doctorate in 2007 with a team from Danish universities that created the world's first pigs using a technique called handmade cloning. She was praised by the Chinese government for bringing the technology to China, which went on to clone genetically modified pigs for the study of human neurological illnesses.</p> <p>China's national science programme said cloned pigs were a stepping stone to chimeras, a controversial area where China wanted to lead the world. Chimeras are organisms composed of cells from two or more species that may be capable of growing organs for human transplantation.</p> <p>Du is now vice president at BGI Genomics Ltd, and won promotion within the Chinese Communist Party, becoming a delegate to its national congress in 2017. She did not respond to a request for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Beijing Olympics: athletes test positive
SOURCE	https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3156522/athletes-test-positive-covid-19-inside-beijing-winter-olympic
GIST	<p>Three athletes attending training events for the Beijing Winter Olympics have tested positive for Covid-19, Chinese officials said Thursday, as the country remains on high alert against the coronavirus ahead of the Games.</p> <p>Beijing 2022 organisers have left nothing to chance before the Games start in February, restricting entry to the capital and insisting on daily virus tests for thousands of athletes who will be kept within a “closed-loop” bubble.</p> <p>One of the athletes, a foreign luger, tested positive at the airport when entering the country and was sent to a quarantine hotel along with another infected teammate as they had no symptoms, officials said last week. But a third person has now tested positive – another luger and a close contact of the earlier cases, Zhao Weidong, an Olympics organising committee member, said on Thursday.</p> <p>The latest patient is asymptomatic and has also been transferred to a quarantine facility for “medical observation,” Zhao told a press conference.</p> <p>Authorities are continuing to “test people, materials and the environment, as well as conducting health monitoring and disinfecting the environment,” Zhao added.</p> <p>China is gearing up to tackle one of the largest challenges to its zero-Covid strategy as thousands of athletes are expected to descend on Beijing for the Games, which will be held from February 4 to 20.</p> <p>City authorities this week imposed strict new rules on inbound travellers, requiring all visitors to Beijing to show a negative Covid test result from the past 48 hours and cancelling flights from higher risk areas within the country.</p> <p>China has kept its domestic case numbers far lower than in most countries, through mass testing, aggressive lockdowns and border controls that left some families separated and many unable to return to work from outside the country.</p>

	<p>The Olympics will test the country's ability to ward off the pandemic, with organisers promising nearly empty stadiums and banning spectators from outside China.</p> <p>All participating athletes and venue staff must be vaccinated, while tens of thousands of workers in higher-risk industries across the city are being tested multiple times a week.</p> <p>The Beijing Winter Games organisers have said the coronavirus is the biggest challenge in the lead-up. The event is also facing boycott calls from international campaigners over human rights concerns in China's Xinjiang region as well as in Hong Kong and Tibet.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Britain: Delta variant cases growing
SOURCE	https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-more-infectious-variant-of-delta-virus-accounts-for-1-in-10-covid-cases-in-england-12471056
GIST	<p>A variant of the Delta virus that is more infectious, but is less likely to cause symptoms, now accounts for more than one in 10 COVID cases in England, new research shows.</p> <p>The latest results from the long-running REACT-1 study shows the prevalence of the AY.4.2 variant has been growing at a rate of 2.8% a day since September.</p> <p>The variant is an evolutionary spin-off from the original Delta virus and is being closely tracked by the UK Health Security Agency.</p> <p>Tests carried out between 19 October and 5 November on around 100,000 randomly selected people showed that 11.8% carried the variant.</p> <p>But the data also shows that only 33% of those with the variant had the classic COVID symptoms of a fever, persistent cough, or a loss or change in taste or smell - compared to 46% of those with Delta.</p> <p>They were also less likely to show any other symptoms.</p> <p>Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme at Imperial College London, said the variant appeared to be even more infectious than the more common Delta version of the virus.</p> <p>"Why it is more transmissible we don't know. It does seem to be less symptomatic, which is a good thing," he said.</p> <p>Professor Christl Donnelly, another of the researchers, said it wasn't clear how the variant would impact the pandemic.</p> <p>"If it is less likely to be symptomatic, then it means it gets tested for less, and people may be out," she said.</p> <p>"On the other hand, if they are not coughing it might be spreading less far in distance."</p> <p>The UK Health Security Agency declared AY.4.2 a 'variant under investigation' on 20 October.</p> <p>Research so far suggests it is associated with a slightly lower risk of hospitalisation and death than Delta. There does not appear to be a significant drop in vaccine effectiveness.</p> <p>The latest REACT-1 results also show the booster dose is highly effective, reducing the risk of infection by two-thirds compared to people who have only had two doses.</p> <p>A single dose of the vaccine given to school children reduces the risk of infection by 56% compared to those who have not had the jab.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Deep nasal swabs needed to test Covid?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/world/swab-test-covid.html
GIST	<p>One Canadian said it felt like a painful poke to his brain. An American heard crunching sounds in her head. A Frenchwoman suffered a severe nosebleed. Others got headaches, cried or were left in shock.</p> <p>They were all tested for Covid-19 with deep nasal swabs. While many people have no complaints about their experience, for some, the swab test — a vital tool in the global battle against the coronavirus — engenders visceral dislike, severe squirming or buckled knees.</p> <p>“It felt like someone was going right into the reset button of my brain to switch something over,” Paul Chin, a music producer and DJ in Toronto, said of his nasal swab test. “There’s truly nothing like it.”</p> <p>“Oh, my goodness,” he continued, “the swab just going farther back into my nose than I’d ever imagined or would have guessed — it’s such a long and sharp and pointy kind of thing.”</p> <p>Since the coronavirus emerged, millions of swabs have been stuck into millions of noses to test for a pernicious virus that has killed millions across the planet. One of the ways to fight the virus, officials say, is to test widely and to test often. The imperative has been to use a test that people are willing to take repeatedly.</p> <p>The swab generally fits the bill.</p> <p>In some parts of the United States, health workers hand people the swab to test themselves, assuring a level of personal comfort. To many South Africans, the only Covid-19 test is a painful one — you see stars or gag because a swab goes down your throat.</p> <p>The range of swabbing raises questions: Who is doing it right? How deeply should the swab slide into your nostril? How long should it spend up there? Does an accurate test have to be uncomfortable? Unfairly or not, some countries have reputations for brutal tests.</p> <p>First, a brief anatomy lesson: No, the swab is not actually stabbing your brain.</p> <p>The swab traverses a dark passage that leads to the nasal cavity. That is enclosed by bone covered in soft, sensitive tissue. At the back of this cavity — more or less in line with your earlobe — is your nasopharynx, where the back of your nose meets the top of your throat. It is one of the places where the coronavirus actively replicates, and it is where you are likely to get a good sample of the virus.</p> <p>Wariness about the test may arise from a simple fact: Most people can’t stand having something shoved so far up their nose. Furthermore, the tests conjure some of our darkest fears: of things that can crawl into our orifices and burrow into our brain.</p> <p>“People aren’t used to feeling that part of their body,” Dr. Noah Kojima, a resident physician at the University of California, Los Angeles and an expert in infectious diseases, said about swabs touching the nasopharynx.</p> <p>Pain enters the picture when the swab — a tuft of nylon attached to a lollipop-like stick — is administered at the wrong angle, said Dr. Yuka Manabe, a professor of medicine specializing in infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.</p> <p>“If you don’t tip your head back, you don’t get to the throat,” she said. “You’re smashing into someone’s bone.”</p> <p>Mr. Chin, the music producer, described his test as a “brain poke” and compared the burning sensation to the effects of breathing in spice.</p>

“Your whole face is kind of ready to leak,” he said, adding, “I don’t really know that there’s any way to be prepared for it.”

There are three main kinds of Covid nasal swab tests: nasopharyngeal (the deepest), mid-turbinate (the middle) and anterior nares (the shallow part of your nose). Early in the pandemic, the deep nose swab was administered widely and aggressively to adults because the method worked when testing for influenza and SARS. Though the science is evolving, experts tend to agree that the deepest swab is the most accurate.

According to a review of studies published in July in [PLOS One](#), a science journal, nasopharyngeal swabs are 98 percent accurate; shallow swabs are 82 percent to 88 percent effective; mid-turbinate swabs perform similarly.

In South Korea, nasopharyngeal swabs remain the gold standard for Covid testing, said Seung-ho Choi, a deputy director of risk communication at the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

“Depending on the skill of the medical staff, it may or may not hurt,” he said. But he said: “The nasopharyngeal test is the most accurate. That’s why we keep doing them.”

The W.H.O. has [guidelines](#) about how best to test; [complications](#) have been rare. Australian [guidelines](#) say swabs should go a few centimeters up adult nostrils. The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) says the mid-turbinate swab should usually be inserted less than an inch, or until it meets resistance. Some testers swab both nostrils.

The K.D.C.A.’s guidelines allow testers some leeway on how to scrape the nasopharynx (wiggling or spinning the swab, or both). Mr. Choi said the experience depends on the brand of swab, the patient’s pain tolerance, the anatomical structure of the nasal cavity and the tester’s proficiency.

Dr. Lee Jaehyeon, a professor of laboratory medicine at Jeonbuk National University who helped develop the Korean government’s Covid-testing guidelines, said the test posed as little risk as drawing blood.

But walking out of a clinic in Seoul this month, some people were sneezing, rubbing their eyes or blowing their noses. One or two were crying.

“It felt like the swab was scraping my brain,” said Chu Yumi, 19.

Kim Kai, 28, who had bloodshot eyes, said, “I think my nose is about to bleed.”

Lee Eunju and Lee Jumi, both 16, said they never wanted to get nasal swabs again. Eunju said it felt as if chili powder had been dumped down her nostrils. Jumi said, “It hurt so much.”

Dr. Lee says the discomfort is a trade-off for accuracy. “This does not mean we can ignore the pain that each patient feels,” he said.

Many people tolerate the test just fine. Dr. Paul Das, a family physician at St. Michael’s Hospital in the Unity Health Toronto network, said children tended to have a tougher time.

Some people chalk up their experiences to testers’ technique or personalities.

“It stings, it’s a little uncomfortable, but I think the person was very gentle,” said Kim Soon Ok, 65, outside a Seoul clinic.

Issa Ba, a 31-year-old soccer player, recalled: “I had my Covid-19 test in Conakry, Guinea, in August before I came to Senegal. I felt a little pain when they put the stick in my nose, but it was not that bad. And I have endured much more intense pain. I am a man.”

	<p>Some countries aim to standardize the tests and remove human error. Developers in Denmark, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan invented robots to do the job.</p> <p>Dr. Manabe, of Johns Hopkins, insists the swabbing should not hurt.</p> <p>Still, painful tales abound.</p> <p>Women often report worse pain than men, studies show, but this could be because of a design bias: Some swabs may be too large for a woman's facial anatomy.</p> <p>Briana Mohler, 28, suffered a nose swabbing in Minnesota in 2020 so excruciating that she heard "crunching."</p> <p>Audrey Benattar, who recently moved back to Marseille, France, recalled her trip to a Montreal hospital in May to give birth. There, a nasal Covid swab left her with burst blood vessels and balloon catheters in both nostrils to stem the bleeding.</p> <p>"I've never seen so much blood in my life," Ms. Benattar, 34, said.</p> <p>Some argue that nose swabs rank relatively low on the scale of squeamish coronavirus tests.</p> <p>This year, China required some travelers from overseas, including diplomats, to submit to anal Covid swab tests, infuriating foreign governments.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Supply crunch: India limits syringe exports
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/11/18/world/covid-vaccine-boosters-mandates#covid-syringes-india
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — Rajiv Nath's factories were cranking out more than 7,600 syringes a minute when India decided to limit their export last month to shore up its own vaccination campaign.</p> <p>The products were meant for clients around the world as nations scramble to inoculate their people and bring the pandemic to an end, but instead Mr. Nath's warehouses were left with stocks of more than 45 million syringes that he had largely promised to UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organization.</p> <p>And with India's export restrictions on syringes in place through the end of this year, experts say the world could experience a shortfall of two billion to four billion needles through the end of next year. The shortages are expected to hit African countries the hardest.</p> <p>"That will be truly disappointing," said Prashant Yadav — a senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, a Washington research organization, and an expert on health care supply chains — "that after having waited for over a year to get a reasonable quantity of vaccines, when they do obtain the vaccines, they don't have syringes to administer them."</p> <p>Although India is a small player in overall global exports, it is a major producer of the type of syringe that is being used globally for coronavirus vaccinations. The syringes break on second use to prevent the spreading of disease through reuse.</p> <p>Covax, the vaccine-sharing initiative, is seeking the syringes from manufacturers around the world, and India was expected to meet at least 15 percent of the global demand for use with Covid vaccines and other inoculations.</p> <p>The situation became so acute last month that the World Health Organization and PAHO asked India to allow Mr. Nath's company, Hindustan Syringes and Medical Devices, one of the world's largest syringe makers, to ship the orders it had agreed to before the restrictions were announced. Prime Minister</p>

Narendra Modi's government subsequently increased the export quota for the health organizations but did not allow a blanket exemption.

The [World Health Organization](#) and UNICEF have warned that the syringe shortage could have “dire consequences” for the global vaccination effort.

In India, more than half of the 1.4 billion-strong population has received at least one shot of a Covid vaccine, but only 28 percent of people are fully vaccinated, according to a [New York Times database](#). And new inoculations have [slowed recently](#).

Unlike vaccine doses, syringes are bulky and are typically transported by sea. The shortage comes amid [large disruptions in the global supply chain of shipped goods](#), and experts say that a Covax-like initiative is needed, with nations coming together to better supply syringes to poorer countries.

UNICEF, a major buyer of syringes for Covax, said in a statement on Wednesday that “syringe nationalism” could be addressed if big producers and wealthy countries “influence global markets in a way that unlocks access for other countries in the global south.”

The agency also said it was considering expanding use of another type of syringe approved by the W.H.O. that also prevents reuse.

Dozens of Indian syringe makers spent millions of dollars to scale up manufacturing last year, but buyers are increasingly relying on manufacturers in China.

ProcureNet, a Hong Kong-based supplier of pharmaceutical products, said this week that it would invest \$20 million in Anhui Tiankang Medical, a Chinese manufacturer, to produce 750 million syringes for PAHO and other buyers.

“We continue to spend billions on the vaccine,” said Gurbaksh Chahal, ProcureNet’s chief executive, “but what good is the vaccine if we don’t have the tools to deliver the vaccine to the people?”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Canada: farm animals dead or trapped
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/18/canada-floods-leave-thousands-of-farm-animals-dead-and-more-trapped
GIST	<p>Thousands of farm animals have died and many more are trapped by floods in desperate need of food and water after the Pacific north-west storm battered a major hub of Canadian agriculture.</p> <p>Torrential rains pummelled swathes of western Canada’s British Columbia and Washington state in the US in recent days – dumping a month’s worth of rain in two days in some areas – causing floods and mudslides that swallowed stretches of highways and forced the evacuation of thousands of people. One person has been killed and several have been reported missing.</p> <p>Abbotsford, one of Canada’s most intensively and diversely farmed areas, was among places hardest hit. Home to more than 1,200 farms, it supplies half of the dairy, eggs and poultry consumed by British Columbia’s 5.2 million residents.</p> <p>Aerial footage showed several barns engulfed by flood waters. Farmers and residents have been frantically scrambling to save their animals from rising waters, resorting to motorboats and jetskis to tow partly submerged cows one by one to higher ground.</p> <p>Many of the farms are in Sumas Prairie, a low-lying fertile stretch of land created by the draining of a lake nearly a century ago. An evacuation order on Tuesday included 121 dairy and poultry farms, according to farmers associations.</p>

Local officials pleaded with about 300 people who defied the order. “If you are still on Sumas Prairie, you need to leave,” said Henry Braun, the mayor of Abbotsford. “I know it’s hard for farmers to leave their livestock, but people’s lives are more important to me right now than livestock or chickens.”

Lana Popham, minister of agriculture for British Columbia, said the storm had battered a key part of the province’s farmland, setting off an animal welfare crisis.

“There are probably hundreds of farms that have been affected by flooding. Some are still underwater, some are on dry locations and we have thousands of animals that have perished,” she said. “We have many, many more that are in difficult situations.”

Officials were racing to carve out routes in impassable areas to get veterinarians to stranded animals, she said. “There will have to be euthanizations that happen, but there are also animals that have survived that are going to be in critical need of food in the next 24 hours.”

Popham said she had spent the past two days on video calls with farmers affected. “Some of them are in their barns, and some of their barns are flooded and you can see the animals are deceased,” she said. “It’s heartbreaking.”

She said while some farmers had towed cows out of the flood waters, the rescued animals were “not in good shape” after their ordeal. “I can also tell you that many farmers attempted to move animals and then had to walk away because the roads were disappearing beneath them.”

In Abbotsford, Braun said it was too early to say how many animals had died. But a helicopter tour had given a dire picture of the storm’s impact. He said: “I saw barns that looked like they were half full of water. I can’t imagine that there are any birds left alive, but we don’t have those numbers.” In 2010, [the area raised more than 9 million poultry birds](#).

Around 9,000 cows were housed at the 60 dairy farms affected by the Sumas Prairie evacuation order, said Holger Schwichtenberg, the chair of the BC Dairy Association.

As news of the order spread, he said dairy farmers had rallied together to stem the losses. “Countless farmers with trucks and trailers started hauling cattle out of the affected areas to farms like mine. We’re in a safe place, so we had 40 cows delivered to us.” He was unable to say how many cows had been moved to higher ground or how many had been left behind.

Farmers have been unable to get their milk to market, forcing some to dump thousands of litres. Schwichtenberg said: “The milk on our farm got dumped last night because there’s no way for the trucks to get here. The roads are impassable.”

The powerful storm comes less than six months after British Columbia was overwhelmed by [record-high temperatures](#) that killed more than 500 people and led to wildfires that [gutted an entire town](#).

“We went through the [heat dome](#) and pretty much drought conditions all summer long and now we get the complete flipside,” he said.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Winter? Mountain states battle wildfires
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/us-mountain-states-wildfire-despite-winter
GIST	<p>Wildfires spread by strong winds tore across Wyoming, Montana and Colorado, rocking the mountain states even as they prepare for winter.</p> <p>With temperatures forecast at just above freezing this week in Colorado, a fire burning roughly 50 miles from Denver forced evacuations and sent plumes of smoke toward the eastern plains. The Kruger Rock fire erupted after strong winds pushed a tree on to a power line. The fire spread quickly through the steep</p>

forested area covered in pine and scrub brush. Winds gusting at 45 mph (73 km/h) fanned the fire slowly eastward while local fire crews struggled to gain access.

A pilot was killed Tuesday night when a fixed-wing plane – which had never before been used to fight fire at night – crashed in the rough terrain.

Fires also forced evacuations in northern Wyoming and south-central Montana, with deputies in some areas going door-to-door warning residents to flee.

One person died in Wyoming, though officials did not release any information on how the death occurred. Kristie Hoffert, medical chief for the Clark fire district, said the person who died was a family member of a firefighter. “It hits incredibly close to home for our department”, she told the Cody Enterprise on Tuesday. “We are struggling.”

In decades past, fire season in the mountainous west wrapped up in the months before the winter storms, typically concluding its siege by August or September. But the climate crisis has delivered hotter days and drier landscapes, with the risks extending deeper into spring and autumn.

“Colorado used to talk about a fire season”, the state’s governor, Jared Polis, said in April. “It’s now a year-round phenomena.”

Meanwhile, a historic drought and recent heat waves tied to the climate crisis have made wildfires harder to fight. Scientists say the climate crisis has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

The National Weather Service in Boulder said an approaching cold front could bring higher wind gusts to the area late Tuesday but lower temperatures just above freezing on Wednesday.

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HEADLINE	11/18 School staff shortages hit poverty areas
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/nov/18/us-school-staff-shortages-high-poverty-districts-study
GIST	<p>Tukwila, Washington, is a working-class suburb just south of Seattle where three-quarters of young people in the city’s schools are low-income and about two-thirds are people of color. Most families rent apartments rather than own homes.</p> <p>Two months into the school year, the 2,800-student district is seeking an extra cafeteria worker, two additional bus drivers and four paraeducators – meaning the school system is operating at about 7% below capacity for those roles. Periodically, district administrators have had to fill in as substitute teachers and the transportation director, normally a desk position, has been forced to drive bus routes.</p> <p>“The impact of a staffing shortage feels more severe this year than it has in the past,” Tukwila human resources director Aaron Draganov told the 74, noting that the district recently saw an “unusually high number of retirements”, especially in transportation.</p> <p>But just a few miles to the northeast, on Mercer Island, the story is completely different.</p> <p>Located between Seattle and Bellevue in a community that is home to a Microsoft co-founder and numerous retired pro athletes, Mercer Island school district has largely avoided such staffing woes. According to Zillow, typical home values in Mercer land around \$2m.</p> <p>“We are not experiencing the same struggles as other districts,” the executive director of human resources, Erin Battersby, told the 74. More than 98% of support staff roles in the 4,500-student district are filled, according to data she provided.</p>

The contrasting circumstances in the two school systems represent a fissure in staffing patterns well beyond the Seattle area.

During a school year marked by fears of K-12 labor shortages – with nationwide reports of [principals driving bus routes](#), superintendents [filling in as substitute teachers](#) and school cafeterias [forgoing hot meals](#) due to a lack of workers – a new analysis out of Washington state quantifies the depth of disparities in teacher and staff vacancy rates between high- and low-poverty school systems.

The research, published on 9 November as a [working paper](#) by the Center for Education Data and Research, combed through the job postings listed this fall in three-quarters of Washington school districts, which account for 98% of all students in the state.

Poorer districts were in need of paraeducators – someone who provides instructional support to students under a teacher’s supervision – and transportation workers at roughly twice and three times the rates, respectively, of their more affluent counterparts, the analysis revealed. They were also seeking a higher share of janitors, nurses, special educators and teachers for English language learners, among other roles – posing yet another setback for the very students most in need of catching up on learning missed during the pandemic.

“The shortages are breaking along existing lines of disparity,” Dan Goldhaber, a University of Washington education economist who co-authored the analysis, told the 74.

The data flush out an emerging nationwide picture of school staffing that previously included little systematic accounting of districts’ on-the-ground conditions, instead relying on local anecdotes and high-level numbers from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The research shows teachers for special education and English learning programs were the most sought-after instructional roles, while districts reported that they most needed teacher assistants and athletic coaches as support staff.

Before the pandemic, public K-12 education employed about 8 million workers, according to federal data, but that number fell to a low of 7.3 million during the first half of the 2020-21 school year. The count has since rebounded to about 7.7 million.

Last year, schools that went remote often didn’t need as many bus drivers, janitors or other support roles, explained Chad Aldeman, policy director of Georgetown University’s Edunomics Lab and a leading voice in critiquing coverage and public perception of school staffing shortages. Now, as districts bring those roles back, they have to compete with mega-employers, such as Amazon and Uber.

This is a “very competitive hiring season”, he said. “It’s definitely an applicant’s market in the sense of, they can be kind of choosy in where they want to go.”

Some of the nation’s largest districts reported hundreds of unfilled positions as of late October. Palm Beach county schools told the 74 that they had 1,044 vacancies, including for 351 teachers. Hillsborough county public schools, which includes Tampa Bay, reported 1,274 openings, 432 of which were teaching roles. And Chicago public schools said it was still hiring for over 3,400 staff, including 680 teachers.

More affluent districts may have an easier time filling positions because salaries are generally higher and the work is seen as less stressful. But the reasons behind the number of vacancies across the board remain blurry. With a huge federal windfall landing on districts’ doorsteps thanks to \$122bn for schools in the American Rescue Plan passed in March of this year, many districts are hiring for new positions that never previously existed in efforts to lower class sizes.

“We don’t have a good sense of the cause of the job openings,” said Aldeman. “Is it because the high-poverty districts can’t find people, or is it that they’re able to hire more right now?”

But the disparities in vacancy rates worry Tequilla Brownie, executive vice-president of The New Teacher Project. She knows that when under-resourced schools have high shares of empty positions, it can translate into long-lasting instructional deficits for poor students.

Research from her organization found that, in Arkansas, where teachers are in short supply statewide, students in high-poverty districts were [more likely to be taught by uncertified teachers](#). Black students were five times more likely than white students to attend school in a high-shortage district.

Some districts, however, appear to have broken the mold. In Dallas, teachers [receive extra compensation](#) – sometimes netting over \$100,000 a year – to work in high-poverty schools. The incentive seems to have helped keep educators around: the district estimates just a 17% turnover rate from this past year, down from as high as 23% in 2015 (though the most recent figure is a slightly up from its 14% rate in 2020).

When schools are short on staff, it's the families and teachers who feel the effects, said Annette Anderson, deputy director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Safe and Healthy Schools.

The K-12 expert is also a mother of three students in the Baltimore City public school system. Recently, her eighth-grade daughter reported that her sixth-grade cousin had been in her class that day. The youngsters' cohorts had been merged due to lack of staff.

"That's a concern for me, because that means my daughter is not getting the level of instruction that she should in her classroom," the Baltimore mother told the 74.

"It's not the teacher's fault," Anderson said. She empathizes as a former classroom teacher and principal. "It's not the fault of the administrator, who's trying to figure it out in the zero hour.

"That's a process and a policy issue," she said.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Upper Midwest Covid infections spike
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/covid-19-upper-midwest-faces-spike/
GIST	<p>The nation is currently facing an alarming COVID-19 spike, with average daily cases jumping 35% in recent weeks, according to the CDC. The upper Midwest has seen the largest surge in infections, with one doctor calling the situation "unprecedented."</p> <p>"I have never seen so many people on a ventilator at one time," said Dr. Joshua Huelster, a critical care physician at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis.</p> <p>Huelster's ICU is full. The hospital system has 328 COVID patients, and most of the 66 ICU COVID patients are on ventilators.</p> <p>Huelster said the reason for the surge is clear: the unvaccinated.</p> <p>"The vast majority of patients that we see in the ICU are not vaccinated," he said.</p> <p>COVID cases in Minnesota are up 47% in the last week compared to the week before. Hospital admissions jumped 24%, with the largest increase among those ages 30 to 49.</p> <p>Susan Rutten, who is not vaccinated, spent a week in a rural Minnesota hospital.</p> <p>"I feel bad taking up a bed if someone needs it worse than I do," she said. She is now home, and said she plans to get the vaccine.</p>

As cases rise nationwide, CBS News has learned that the FDA is considering authorizing boosters for all adults for both Pfizer and Moderna as soon as Thursday. But just over 31% of the country is still unvaccinated.

Huelster said he's worried about the toll more COVID cases will take — not only on patients, but also on the staff that cares for them.

"I'm not angry at people who don't get vaccinated," Huelster said. "Some of my colleagues get very angry about it. I'm not angry about it. I'm disappointed."

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HEADLINE	11/18 Mexico minors enter US for vaccinations
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/mexico-sends-minors-us-coronavirus-vaccine-81262646
GIST	<p>SAN DIEGO -- Scores of Mexican adolescents were bused to California on Thursday to get vaccinated against the coronavirus as efforts get underway across Mexico to get shots in the arms of teens.</p> <p>Mexico has resisted vaccinating minors ages 12 to 17, in part because the government focused on older adults believed to be more vulnerable. Mexico also has not had enough vaccine supply for most of its minors, who account for one-third of its population. The country this month is preparing to start vaccinating only teens ages 15-17.</p> <p>So a group in San Diego along with San Diego County stepped in to help their neighbor.</p> <p>The pilot program in San Diego aims to get shots in the arms of 450 youths ages 12 to 17 before it ends in late December. The adolescents from Tijuana were selected by Mexican social service organizations, including those who work with the children of parents deported from the United States.</p> <p>About 150 kids from Tijuana were bused to the Mexican consulate in San Diego on Thursday where county nurses administered the Pfizer vaccine.</p> <p>Among them was 14-year-old Leslie Flores who said she was nervous but also happy about getting the shot.</p> <p>"Because this way I can protect myself and my family," Leslie said.</p> <p>The county donated the doses. The teens will return in about three weeks for a second shot.</p> <p>All of the adolescents have a U.S. visa or passport, but they were unable to come to the United States before now to get the vaccine because they did not have an adult able to cross the border with them, said Carlos González Gutiérrez, the Mexican consul in San Diego.</p> <p>Adrian Medina Amarillas, Baja California's secretary of health, praised the effort.</p> <p>"Baja California is experiencing a third wave" of infections, he said. "There is no doubt that this will help."</p> <p>The program will be evaluated in early 2022 and officials will decide then whether it needs to be continued.</p> <p>Hundreds of parents in Mexico have taken legal action against the Mexican government to demand the right to be able to give the vaccine to their children. Overall, about 84% of Mexico's adult population has had at least one dose of the vaccine.</p>

	<p>The effort comes less than two weeks after the United States fully reopened its borders, and Mexican officials see it as another step toward ensuring the border stays that way. Border businesses were decimated by the 18-month closure to tourists and shoppers.</p> <p>About 80% of the adult populations in both San Diego County and in Baja California have received at least one dose of the vaccine.</p> <p>The first mass vaccination of Mexican minors happened last month along the Texas border when more than 1,000 children from the Mexican border state of Coahuila were bused to Eagle Pass, where they got their first shot of the Pfizer vaccine administered by members of the Texas National Guard. The youths ages 12 to 17 are the children of workers at border assembly plants known as maquiladoras.</p> <p>In May and early June, more than 26,000 maquiladora workers in Baja California were vaccinated at the San Ysidro border crossing in San Diego.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Austria lockdown; mandatory vaccinations
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/austria-enter-lockdown-bring-mandatory-vaccinations-81272314
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said Friday that the country will go into a national lockdown to contain a fourth wave of coronavirus cases.</p> <p>Schallenberg said the lockdown will start Monday and initially last for 10 days. Most stores will close, and cultural events will be canceled.</p> <p>He initially said all students would have to go back into home schooling. Wolfgang Mueckstein, the country's health minister, later said that schools would remain open for those who needed to go there but all parents were asked to keep their children at home if possible.</p> <p>Starting on Feb. 1, the country will also make vaccinations mandatory, public broadcaster ORF reported.</p> <p>"We do not want a fifth wave," Schallenberg said, according to ORF. "Not do we want a sixth or seventh wave."</p> <p>Austria had initially introduced a national lockdown only for the unvaccinated that started Monday but as virus cases continued to skyrocket the government said it had no choice but to extend it to everyone.</p> <p>"This is very painful," Schallenberg said.</p> <p>The national lockdown will initially last for 10 days, then the effects will be assessed and if virus cases have not gone down sufficiently, it can be extended to a maximum of 20 days.</p> <p>Austria, a country of 8.9 million, has one of the lowest vaccination rates in Western Europe. For the past seven days, the country reported more than 10,000 new infection cases daily. Hospitals have been overwhelmed with many new COVID-19 patients, and deaths have been rising again, too.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Baffling: Africa avoids Covid disaster
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/scientists-mystified-wary-africa-avoids-covid-disaster-81271647
GIST	<p>HARARE, Zimbabwe -- At a busy market in a poor township outside Harare this week, Nyasha Ndou kept his mask in his pocket, as hundreds of other people, mostly unmasked, jostled to buy and sell fruit and vegetables displayed on wooden tables and plastic sheets. As in much of Zimbabwe, here the coronavirus is quickly being relegated to the past, as political rallies, concerts and home gatherings have returned.</p>

“COVID-19 is gone, when did you last hear of anyone who has died of COVID-19?” Ndou said. “The mask is to protect my pocket,” he said. “The police demand bribes so I lose money if I don’t move around with a mask.” Earlier this week, Zimbabwe recorded just 33 new COVID-19 cases and zero deaths, in line with a recent fall in the disease across the continent, where World Health Organization data show that infections have been dropping since July.

When the coronavirus first emerged last year, health officials feared the pandemic would sweep across Africa, killing millions. Although it’s still unclear what COVID-19’s ultimate toll will be, that catastrophic scenario has yet to materialize in Zimbabwe or much of the continent.

Scientists emphasize that obtaining accurate COVID-19 data, particularly in African countries with patchy surveillance, is extremely difficult, and warn that declining coronavirus trends could easily be reversed.

But there is something “mysterious” going on in Africa that is puzzling scientists, said Wafaa El-Sadr, chair of global health at Columbia University. “Africa doesn’t have the vaccines and the resources to fight COVID-19 that they have in Europe and the U.S., but somehow they seem to be doing better,” she said.

Fewer than 6% of people in Africa are vaccinated. For months, the WHO has described Africa as “one of the least affected regions in the world” in its weekly pandemic reports.

Some researchers say the continent’s younger population -- the average age is 20 versus about 43 in Western Europe — in addition to their lower rates of urbanization and tendency to spend time outdoors, may have spared it the more lethal effects of the virus so far. Several studies are probing whether there might be other explanations, including genetic reasons or exposure to other diseases.

Christian Happi, director of the African Center of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Diseases at Redeemer’s University in Nigeria, said authorities are used to curbing outbreaks even without vaccines and credited the extensive networks of community health workers.

“It’s not always about how much money you have or how sophisticated your hospitals are,” he said.

Devi Sridhar, chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh, said African leaders haven’t gotten the credit they deserve for acting quickly, citing Mali’s decision to close its borders before COVID-19 even arrived.

“I think there’s a different cultural approach in Africa, where these countries have approached COVID with a sense of humility because they’ve experienced things like Ebola, polio and malaria,” Sridhar said.

In past months, the coronavirus has pummeled South Africa and is estimated to have killed more than 89,000 people there, by far the most deaths on the continent. But for now, African authorities, while acknowledging that there could be gaps, are not reporting huge numbers of unexpected fatalities that might be COVID-related. WHO data show that deaths in Africa make up just 3% of the global total. In comparison, deaths in the Americas and Europe account for 46% and 29%.

In Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country, the government has recorded nearly 3,000 deaths so far among its 200 million population. The U.S. records that many deaths every two or three days.

The low numbers have Nigerians like Opemipo Are, a 23-year-old in Abuja, feeling relieved. “They said there will be dead bodies on the streets and all that, but nothing like that happened,” she said.

Oyewale Tomori, a Nigerian virologist who sits on several WHO advisory groups, suggested Africa might not even need as many vaccines as the West. It’s an idea that, while controversial, he says is being seriously discussed among African scientists — and is reminiscent of the proposal British officials made last March to let COVID-19 freely infect the population to build up immunity.

That doesn’t mean, however, that vaccines aren’t needed in Africa.

“We need to be vaccinating all out to prepare for the next wave,” said Salim Abdool Karim, an epidemiologist at South Africa’s University of KwaZulu-Natal, who previously advised the South African government on COVID-19. “Looking at what’s happening in Europe, the likelihood of more cases spilling over here is very high.”

The impact of the coronavirus has also been relatively muted in poor countries like Afghanistan, where experts predicted outbreaks amid ongoing conflict would prove disastrous.

Hashmat Arifi, a 23-year-old student in Kabul, said he hadn’t seen anyone wearing a mask in months, including at a recent wedding he attended alongside hundreds of guests. In his university classes, more than 20 students routinely sit unmasked in close quarters.

“I haven’t seen any cases of corona lately,” Arifi said. So far, Afghanistan has recorded about 7,200 deaths among its 39 million people, although little testing was done amid the conflict and the actual numbers of cases and deaths are unknown.

Back in Zimbabwe, doctors were grateful for the respite from COVID-19 — but feared it was only temporary.

“People should remain very vigilant,” warned Dr. Johannes Marisa, president of the Medical and Dental Private Practitioners of Zimbabwe Association. He fears that another coronavirus wave would hit Zimbabwe next month. “Complacency is what is going to destroy us because we may be caught unaware.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 New Mexico serious problems amid surge
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/mexico-facing-problems-amid-latest-covid-19-surge/story?id=81210830
GIST	<p>COVID-19 cases in New Mexico are "trending in a worrisome direction," health officials said this week, as they called on residents to get vaccinated amid the surge.</p> <p>New Mexico reported 1,530 new cases and 539 hospitalizations Wednesday, rivaling numbers last seen in December and January, during the state's last COVID-19 wave.</p> <p>"Things are not going well in our hospitals," Dr. David Scrase, acting cabinet secretary of the New Mexico Department of Health, said during a COVID-19 briefing Wednesday, noting the state is "facing some very serious problems," including with intensive care unit capacity.</p> <p>"Last week, we had only eight ICU beds, now we're up to 10 -- still nowhere near enough ICU beds," he said. "What this does mean is someone having a heart attack right now may or may not have access to ICU care in New Mexico, and frankly, as cases start rising again in other states, we may not find a bed there."</p> <p>Six hospitals across the state have activated crisis standards of care in recent weeks, including the University of New Mexico Health System's and Presbyterian Healthcare Services' Albuquerque metro hospitals, as they are being stretched to the limit in terms of space and staffing due to increasing COVID-19 hospitalizations and a high volume of patients with acute conditions, officials said.</p> <p>The decision means that nonessential medical procedures could be delayed by up to 90 days, and patients may need to get treated at different regional hospitals, or possibly out of state, hospital officials said.</p> <p>Given the high risk for exposure and rising hospitalizations, New Mexico was one of the first in a growing number of states to urge all fully vaccinated adults to get boosters once they meet the six- or two-month thresholds, ahead of federal authorization.</p>

"I want folks to get their boosters," New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said during the briefing. "Until we get to that 80, 85, 90% of individuals who are eligible for a booster, we are going to see these risks where we have breakthrough infections."

Over 21% of fully vaccinated residents have gotten a booster dose, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Health officials have cited waning immunity among fully vaccinated residents as one of the factors fueling the surge in COVID-19 cases, along with transmission of the highly contagious delta variant, increased tourism to the region and colder weather driving people indoors.

Amid the surge, health officials are also focused on getting shots to people who have yet to get a first dose. Unvaccinated residents remain a major driver of transmission and make up the bulk of hospitalizations, with over 71% of new COVID-19 cases and nearly 80% of hospitalizations reported from Oct. 18 to Nov. 15 in unvaccinated people, according to [state data](#).

"Full vaccination is still New Mexico's first priority," Dr. Laura Parajón, deputy secretary for the New Mexico Department of Health, said during the briefing. "If you look at the whole of New Mexico, the whole population, 61.4% of all New Mexicans are vaccinated. However, we are having a surge, because 38.6% of people still remain unvaccinated."

COVID-19 cases across New Mexico are currently "trending in a worrisome direction," according to Dr. Christine Ross, the state epidemiologist, with the positivity rate at about 12.5%.

"What this means to us is there's a very high burden of disease in our communities," she said during the briefing, noting that transmission among school-aged children in particular is "very concerning."

Over 25% of COVID-19 infections in the past week in New Mexico were pediatric cases, according to Ross. With children ages 5 to 11 newly eligible to get vaccinated, health officials urged parents to get their children vaccinated.

"We know that children are at low risk for serious outcomes, but they are not at zero risk," Ross said. "These vaccines are safe and highly effective. This is the best tool to protect your kids and to prevent onward transmission of the virus and to help us end the pandemic."

Scrase said he is excited by the prospect of outpatient oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19, such as [molnupiravir](#), though they're not available yet.

For now, he urged people to continue to follow measures like social distancing and mask-wearing. New Mexico is one of a handful of states that still have mask mandates in effect. The state's health department [extended an order](#) requiring masks while in indoor public settings through Dec. 10, due to the significant COVID-19 case counts and strained hospital capacity.

Scrase also warned against unproven treatments for COVID-19, noting that New Mexico saw a third death since August from [ivermectin](#), an anti-parasite medicine that is not authorized by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of COVID-19. The man took 150 milligrams of a horse formulation of ivermectin and suffered from liver and kidney failure, according to Scrase.

Health officials said they're continuing to work with community health workers and local organizations to combat misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.

"We're really trying to meet people where they're at," Parajón said.

HEADLINE	11/18 China laws hindering access ships' AIS?
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/are-chinas-new-privacy-laws-scuppering-access-to-ship-positioning-systems/
GIST	<p>The International Maritime Organization and other shipping bodies need to know where large ships are sailing in order to prevent them from running into each other. So they use something called the automatic identification system, or AIS, which transmit the position of vessels so captain know where they are.</p> <p>Two new Chinese privacy laws, the Data Security Law (DSL) and the Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL), appear to be stifling international access to Chinese AIS data, according to a new Reuters report.</p> <p>Multiple Western users of AIS data have reported that AIS signals off the coast of China have slowed to a trickle – and the decline isn't because ships have turned off their AIS transceivers.</p> <p>Instead, it appears that Chinese AIS data providers are concerned they are going to run afoul of rules laid out in China's DSL and PIPL, which both took effect in recent months, so they are erring on the side of caution and not transmitting the information.</p> <p>The two laws restrict foreign access to any “important” data that appears to have any effect on national security or the nation's infrastructure. Companies that fail to comply with the DSL or PIPL face millions of dollars in penalties.</p> <p>Because it is unclear how the laws will be enforced, Chinese AIS data vendors are cutting down on transmissions, the story said. One unnamed Chinese AIS data vendor told Reuters that it had actually stopped selling its AIS data to foreign entities.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Prepare for holiday ransomware attacks
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/cyber-defenders-should-prepare-holiday-ransomware-attacks
GIST	<p>High days and holidays are prime time for ransomware. This should come as no surprise to anyone – but many companies remain surprisingly unaware or at least unprepared.</p> <p>On August 31, 2021 – just ahead of Labor Day – a joint alert from the FBI and CISA warned that ransomware attacks will likely increase on specific holidays and generally throughout the entire holiday season. The alert specifically cited the DarkSide Colonial Pipeline attack (Mother's Day weekend), the REvil JBS attack (Memorial Day weekend), and the Sodinokibi/REvil Kaseya attack (Fourth of July holiday weekend).</p> <p>We are now approaching the Thanksgiving holiday. “We absolutely expect attacks focused on Thanksgiving Day,” Israel Barak, CISO at Cybereason, told <i>SecurityWeek</i>. “It happens at almost every holiday and long weekend. We can assume with 100% certainty that there will be an increase in cyberattacks during the Thanksgiving weekend.”</p> <p>Such increases will occur on all specific holidays, but also for the entire holiday season that starts with Thanksgiving and continues into the New Year. The reasons are simple and obvious, but slightly different between the holidays and the holiday season.</p> <p>On holidays, the risk is across all industries. Fewer staff are operational. “Cybercrime groups take advantage of the longer than usual incident response times caused by staff availability issues,” explained Barak. “Staff come back after the long weekend and find the entire environment has been encrypted and there's a ransom note waiting for them.”</p> <p>Across the longer holiday season, the threat is increased for slightly different reasons – and especially for the retail (and retail-related) and transport sectors. “For many of these companies, this is the highlight of</p>

the year when they make the most money,” he continued. “Any minor disruption can have a major impact on the overall yearly performance, and as a result, there is an expectation or perception within the cyber crime ecosystem that these companies will have a higher propensity to pay a ransom fee more quickly.”

So, on holidays attacks increase because the attackers have the time and opportunity to embed and enact their plans against prime targets, while the holiday season simply promises easier and more likely payouts. The combination means that the holiday season is also cybercrime season.

None of this should be news. But Cybereason wanted to see if industry is making adequate preparation and taking adequate precautions. It queried more than 1200 security professionals working at organizations that have previously suffered a successful ransomware attack on a holiday or weekend. The results highlighted in a report ([PDF eBook](#)) on the survey are surprising and demonstrate a disconnect between knowledge of the threat and senior leaders’ perception of the risk.

The respondents had all suffered from a successful holiday or weekend ransomware attack. Sixty percent of respondents said it resulted in longer periods to assess the scope of the attack, 50% reported it took more time to mount an effective response, and 33% indicated it required a longer period to fully recover from the attack. Holiday attacks are easier to implement but lead to more difficult recovery.

Eighty-six percent of the respondents said they had missed a holiday or weekend activity while responding to a ransomware incident, while 70% confessed to being intoxicated when they did so.

But despite this personal experience, nearly half of the respondents feel they still do not have the right tools in place to manage a new attack; and 24% do not have a contingency plan to ensure a rapid response over holidays and weekends.

This disconnect between knowledge of the threat and taking adequate steps to avoid or mitigate the risk is the most concerning aspect of the survey. Barak believes there are two primary reasons for the disconnect. The first is a combination of the optimism bias (‘threats don’t target me’) and the mistaken belief that lightning doesn’t strike twice.

“This mostly affects SMBs,” he told *SecurityWeek*. “What companies ignore is that a lot of times the attacks aren’t specifically targeted, but are the result of automated scans looking for low hanging fruit that can easily be breached. Once found, the attackers tend not to discriminate – all are potential sources of income – and the human-led operation begins.” Such attacks occur all year round, but will increase during the holiday season.

“The second reason,” he continued, “is a misconception that cyber extortion insurance will pick up the bill. From earlier research, we found in 48% of cases, the insurance covered only a portion of the damages from the attack. Insurance cannot recover lost data, and there are numerous indirect costs not included.” Insurance should be treated as an addition to cybersecurity, not a replacement for it.

The message from Cybereason’s research is clear: simply being aware that ransomware attacks will almost certainly increase over the next few months is not enough. Industry must put in place specific contingency plans to cover staff shortages and recover from a successful attack.

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HEADLINE	11/18 APT41 manage library breached certificates
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/chinas-apt41-manages-library/
GIST	<p>A freelance Chinese APT group is actively managing a library of compromised code-signing digital certificates to support cyber-espionage attacks targeting supply chain vendors, according to Venafi.</p> <p>The security vendor’s latest research report details the work of APT41, an unusual group in that it has previously been observed carrying out attacks for both traditional state-sponsored cyber-espionage and personal financial gain.</p>

Venafi claimed that using the certificates and keys that authenticate pieces of code are a key part of its tactics.

APT41 is reportedly managing a library of these certs and keys – some purchased from underground marketplaces, some obtained from other Chinese attack groups and some stolen by APT41 itself.

This shared resource allows members of the group to select the appropriate certificate for their needs, “dramatically” improving success rates, according to Venafi.

These attacks, conducted in support of China’s long-term economic, military and political goals – are often directed at the digital supply chain, allowing easy compromise of downstream customers.

“Code-signing machine identities allow malicious code to appear authentic and evade security controls. The success of attacks using this model over the past decade has created a blueprint for sophisticated attacks that have been highly successful because they are very difficult to detect,” explained Venafi threat intelligence specialist Yana Blachman.

“Since targeting the Windows software utility [CCleaner in 2018](#) and [Asus LiveUpdate in 2019](#), APT41’s methods continue to improve. Every software provider should be aware of this threat and take steps to protect their software development environments.”

Once the targeted downstream organization is compromised via secondary malware, APT41 then moves laterally across networks, using stolen credentials and reconnaissance tools to steal IP and customer data, the report claimed.

APT41 was responsible for one of the most widespread Chinese cyber campaigns of recent years when it [exploited Citrix and Zoho endpoints](#) at scores of global organizations across multiple verticals.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Hackers target e-commerce servers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-deploy-linux-malware-web-skimmer-on-e-commerce-servers/
GIST	<p>Security researchers discovered that attackers are also deploying a Linux backdoor on compromised e-commerce servers after injecting a credit card skimmer into online shops' websites.</p> <p>The PHP-coded web skimmer (a script designed to steal and exfiltrate customers' payment and personal info) is added and camouflaged as a .JPG image file in the /app/design/frontend/ folder.</p> <p>The attackers use this script to download and inject fake payment forms on checkout pages displayed to customers by the hacked online shop.</p> <p>"We found that the attacker started with automated eCommerce attack probes, testing for dozens of weaknesses in common online store platforms," the Sansec Threat Research Team revealed.</p> <p>"After a day and a half, the attacker found a file upload vulnerability in one of the store's plugins. S/he then uploaded a webshell and modified the server code to intercept customer data."</p> <p>Linux malware undetected by security software</p> <p>The Golang-based malware, spotted by Dutch cyber-security company Sansec on the same server, was downloaded and executed on breached servers as a linux_avp executable.</p> <p>Once launched, it immediately removes itself from the disk and camouflages itself as a "ps -ef" process that would be used to get a list of currently-running processes.</p>

	<p>While analyzing the linux_avp backdoor, Sansec found that it waits for commands from a Beijing server hosted on Alibaba's network.</p> <p>They also discovered that the malware would gain persistence by adding a new crontab entry that would redownload the malicious payload from its command-and-control server and reinstall the backdoor if detected and removed or the server restarts.</p> <p>Until now, this backdoor remains undetected by anti-malware engines on VirusTotal even though a sample was first uploaded more than one month ago, on October 8th.</p> <p>The uploader might be the linux_avp creator since it was submitted one day after researchers at Dutch cyber-security company Sansec spotted it while investigating the e-commerce site breach.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 NKorea hacking group targets diplomats
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/north-korean-groups-focus-on-financial-gain-persistence
GIST	<p>A North Korean cyber-operations group has increased its focus on cyber espionage and targeting diplomats and regional experts, using captured user credentials to fuel phishing attacks and only rarely using malware to persist in targeted organizations.</p> <p>A new report by message-security firm Proofpoint, which focused on a single subgroup of what other security firms call Kimsuky, found that the North Korean group mainly targets individuals in the United States, Russia, and China, and usually attempts to quietly harvest credentials, siphon off information, and — like many attacks attributed to North Korea — turn compromises into financial gain.</p> <p>The hacking group, which Proofpoint calls Threat Actor 406 (TA406), attempted to compromise high-level officials, law enforcement leaders, and experts in economics and finance in weekly attacks — a departure from lower-level attacks in past years.</p> <p>In addition, prior to 2021, North Korean groups have not typically used national security issues as a lure, but that has changed, says Sherrod DeGrippe, vice president of threat research and detection at Proofpoint.</p> <p>"The most notable aspects of TA406 are their flexibility in using any means for financial gain and their persistence in targeting the same individuals [and] organizations repeatedly," she says. "Like with other state-aligned groups, those aligned with North Korea vary in their skillset and likely have ever-evolving objectives based on state interests."</p> <p>While cyber operations by China and Russia usually garner the most attention, experts have focused recently on activities by groups linked to Iran and North Korea. This week, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned that attacks by Iran-linked groups are attempting to exploit known vulnerabilities in Fortinet network appliances and Microsoft's Exchange server. North Korea's well-known Lazarus Group has targeted supply chains, compromising a South Korean security-software vendor and a Latvian IT asset-management vendor.</p> <p>More recently, North Korean has focused much of its efforts on espionage campaigns and targeting organizations for financial gain, with cryptocurrency a common target of attacks.</p> <p>"In early 2021, TA406 began almost weekly campaigns featuring themes that included nuclear weapon safety, U.S. President Joe Biden, Korean foreign policy and other political themes," the Proofpoint report stated. "The group attempted to collect credentials, such as Microsoft logins or other corporate credentials, from the targeted individuals. In some cases, the emails were benign in nature, [but] these messages may have been attempts by the attackers to engage with victims before sending them a malicious link or attachment."</p>

Three North Korean Groups

The report compared three subgroups of the sprawling North Korean cyber campaign known as Kimsuky. The effort included TA406, but Proofpoint also described how that group of operators differed from other subgroups, such as TA408 and TA427, which typically focus on a smaller subset of targets. The groups typically target government, academic, media, and organizations linked to cryptocurrency.

The groups have shifted more toward a variety of techniques for harvesting credentials, especially those usernames and passwords for political and financial targets, the report stated.

"TA406 conducts credential-phishing campaigns that target experts at political and foreign policy organizations and NGOs, especially those who are working with or are experts on activities that impact the Korean Peninsula, including nuclear nonproliferation," Proofpoint stated.

Harvesting Credentials

The attackers use a variety of different messaging platforms, including running their own systems based on PHP servers, such as PHPMailer and Star, but also using major service providers, such as Gmail or Yandex, along with stolen or synthetic identities to fool targeted individuals. In some cases, the cyber operations team also used malware to gain persistence in a particular environment.

"Credential harvesting campaigns typically targeted multiple organizations at a time while malware campaigns were deployed in limited, very targeted cases," DeGrippe says. "In 2021, malware campaigns represented less than 10% of overall activity attributable to TA406."

Attackers have increasingly focused on credential harvesting as more employees work from home and access cloud services and online infrastructure, often using only a username and password. Credential spraying, where attackers attempt to use stolen or common passwords to gain access to accounts, have skyrocketed in the past year, [with more than 193 billion attempted logins in 2020](#), according to Akamai.

With cloud access becoming increasingly important, the trend has continued in 2021, with access to remote desktop protocol (RDP) servers and virtual private network (VPN) appliances [among the most valuable credentials sold online](#), according to IBM.

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HEADLINE	11/18 California Pizza Kitchen suffers data breach
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/california-pizza-kitchen-suffers-data-breach
GIST	<p>Restaurant chain California Pizza Kitchen was recently hit in a cyberattack that compromised the personal information of more than 100,000 current and former employees.</p> <p>According to reports, the company on Sept. 15 was alerted of a "disruption" to its systems. By Oct. 4 it learned that attackers had grabbed employee names and Social Security numbers.</p> <p>"Upon discovering this incident, we immediately took steps to review and reinforce the security of our computing environment. We are reviewing existing security policies and have implemented additional measures to further protect against similar incidents moving forward," the company said in a statement, according to a TechCrunch report.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 'PerSwaysion' phishing campaign ongoing
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/perswaysion-phishing-campaign-continues-to-be-an-active-threat-for-organizations
GIST	A phishing kit that has been used in thousands of attacks worldwide has been active for significantly longer than previously thought — and it continues to pose a potent threat to organizations across multiple sectors, new analysis shows.

The kit, named PerSwaysion, is designed to give cybercriminals a way to launch a phishing campaign relatively easily and with little up-front effort. The most notable aspect about the threat is its use of Microsoft file-sharing services, such as Sway, SharePoint, and OneNote, to lure users to credential-stealing sites.

David Pearson, co-founder and CEO of newly launched SeclarityIO, says his company's analysis of data on PerSwaysion shows the campaign, in fact, launched as far back as at least October 2017 and is currently active despite public disclosure of the group's phishing kit and TTPs.

An analysis of data from URLscan showed that over the last 18 months alone, some 7,403 people from across 14 industry sectors landed on 444 unique PerSwaysion phishing portals at some point. Victims came from organizations within the US government, financial services, pharmaceutical, healthcare, aerospace, engineering, technology, and other sectors. Pearson estimates the number of organizations impacted by the campaign since May 2020 to be, at least, in the high hundreds.

"Realistically, this has gone on for so long it is likely that just about [every sector] is impacted," Pearson says. "This is a phishing kit that has customers all over the world, and [attackers] are targeting whoever they want."

Security vendor Group-IB gave the campaign its name last year after observing how extensively it abused the Sway service as part of the attack chain. In an [April 2020 report](#), Group-IB described PerSwaysion as a collection of small but targeted phishing attacks executed by multiple criminal groups mainly against small and midsize financial services companies, real estate groups and law firms.

The security vendor had assessed the PerSwaysion campaign had been ongoing since 2019 and had successfully compromised email accounts belonging to at least 156 high-ranking officials at multiple organizations located mainly in the US and Canada, and to a lesser number in global financial hubs in Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, and Hong Kong.

Previous reporting on PerSwaysion by Group-IB and others had described attackers as deploying a three-phase operation to lure users to credential-grabbing phishing sites. According to Group-IB, the first phase involves potential victims receiving a well-crafted spear-phishing email with a non-malicious PDF attachment purporting to be a Microsoft file-sharing notification.

Users who click on the "Read Now" hyperlink in the notification are directed to a file hosted on Microsoft Sway or — less often — another Microsoft file-sharing service. The page is designed to look exactly like an authentic Microsoft file-sharing site except when users click on the Read Now link, they are directed to a credential-harvesting site designed to look like an account sign-on page.

Drag-and-Drop Op

Pearson says his [analysis of PerSwaysion](#) shows the kit essentially makes deploying a phishing portal a drag-and-drop operation for attackers. The kit contains templates for spoofing account login pages belonging to eight trusted brands, including Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and — as an indication of just how long the kit has been around — some older brands like Hotmail and AOL.

The kit's attack infrastructure itself consists of a front-end phishing portal that victims land on when they click through the URL links, a template hosting site, a redirector site that ensures the appropriate template is served up to the victim, and the credential collection site itself.

Fresh Insight

Pearson says SeclarityIO was also able to uncover fresh insight into the attack vectors that different threat actors used to initially deliver the PerSwaysion kit to potential victims thanks to its network interpreter technology.

	<p>The platform allows organizations to upload any kind of traffic flow format to understand, for example, who might have communicated with whom on the network, how many packets were sent and received, and other metrics.</p> <p>"We don't look at any payload information," Pearson says. "We just look at the flow of information, and we have 30 or so categories that we group traffic into."</p> <p>SecularityIO categorizes communication to any port on any site, he adds, to help organizations identify malicious activity, like command-and-control (C2) traffic. The technology works with an organization's network flows and helps security analysts visualize what vectors an attacker might have used to evade defenses, how a user might have interacted with the site, and whether that interaction requires remediation, Pearson notes.</p> <p>SecularityIO's platform helped show that in some PerSwaysion attacks, threat actors used URL shorteners, such as bit.ly and tiny.cc, to try and bypass email filters and to make malicious URLs appear more legitimate. In other instances, attackers used email platforms such as sendgrid.net to deliver their phishing lures straight to user email inboxes. Other tactics included luring users to legitimate but compromised websites, redirects through online ads, and open redirects to reroute users to a different site from which they intended to go.</p> <p>Pearson says SecularityIO has been unable to determine how the PerSwaysion kit is marketed. They have also been unable to dig up any more information on who might have developed the kit beyond what Group-IB already revealed last year: that the operators likely are Vietnamese-speaking.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Spear-phishing harvests credentials
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/spear-phishing-exploits-glitch-steal-credentials/176449/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A long-term spear-phishing campaign is targeting employees of major corporations with emails containing PDFs that link to short-lived Glitch apps hosting credential-harvesting SharePoint phishing pages, researchers have found.</p> <p>Researchers from DomainTools discovered the suspicious PDFs – which themselves do not include malicious content – back in July, wrote Senior Security Researcher Chad Anderson, in a report published Thursday.</p> <p>Instead, the malicious activity propagated by the PDFs is a link to Glitch apps hosting phishing pages that included obfuscated JavaScript for stealing credentials, he wrote. Glitch is a Web-based project-management tool with a built-in code editor for running and hosting software projects ranging from simple websites to large applications.</p> <p>The campaign appears to be targeting only employees working in the Middle East as “a single campaign” in a series of similar, SharePoint-themed phishing scams, Anderson wrote.</p> <p>Abusing Glitch</p> <p>To understand how the campaign works, one needs to understand how the free version of Glitch works, Anderson explained. The platform allows an app to operate for five minutes exposed to the internet with a Glitch-provided hostname using three random words, he wrote.</p> <p>“For example, one document directed the recipient to hammerhead-resilient-birch.glitch[.]me where the malicious content was stored,” Anderson explained in the post. “Once the five minutes is up, the account behind the page has to click to serve their page again.”</p> <p>It’s this “ephemeral nature” that makes Glitch shared spaces ideal for threat actors that wish to host malicious content, given that they are difficult to detect. This is especially true “because Glitch’s domains are trusted and often allowlisted on many networks already,” Anderson explained.</p>

“Spaces where code can run and be hosted for free are a gold mine for attackers, especially considering many of the base domains are implicitly trusted by the blocklists corporations ingest,” he wrote. “This delegation of trust allows for attackers to utilize a seemingly innocuous PDF with only a link to a trusted base domain to maneuver past defenses and lure in user trust.”

In this campaign, attackers used this aspect alongside exfiltration of credentials to compromised WordPress sites to create an attack chain that can sneak past defensive tooling, Anderson wrote. DomainTools Research attempted to speak to Glitch about this potential for abuse of the platform, but as yet has been unsuccessful, he added.

Discovering the Campaign

DomainTools researchers discovered the threat activity during regular monitoring and hunting for malicious documents tied to previous campaigns, Anderson wrote. Specifically, the team came across a PDF document purporting to be an invoice that included a URI section that linked to an outside page – something that typically wouldn’t sound an alarm, he wrote.

However, in this case, an email address was appended to the URL as a fragment, which typically references an “id” element on an HTML page, but which also can be manipulated using CSS. Moreover, the email address belonged to a legitimate employee at a corporation based in the United Arab Emirates: something that smacked of spear-phishing to researchers, Anderson wrote.

Researchers hunted for similar documents and found nearly 70 dating back to July 30, all using different URLs to target email addresses of actual individuals working at large corporations, he explained.

“Though each URL and email was one of a kind, the documents themselves did link to the same named page each time: red.htm,” suggesting a common scam, Anderson wrote.

Evading Detection

Because of the short-lived nature of the pages being used to harvest credentials, researchers said they were challenged to find live pages serving up the ultimate payload of the campaign. They had to use the tool URLScan, which allowed them to search through all of the scanned sites over the last month.

Eventually, researchers uncovered a live site using the AnyRun service, a commercial malware sandbox and public repository of executed malware that can be used to find specific interactions from malicious code, Anderson explained. While the team still didn’t find the next-stage payload, it did uncover a screenshot of the Microsoft SharePoint phishing login being used to lure the victim, he wrote.

“While the page content was not available, DomainTools Research did take note of the document name as well as the redirect to ‘in.htm’ as the next page after the ‘red.htm’ page in the initial PDF document,” Anderson explained.

Researchers found a number of matching HTML documents that tied to previous PDFs on VirusTotal – the initial PDF documents designed to pass the email of the target along as a URL fragment – by using email addresses pre-populated on the page, he wrote.

The team also found “chunks” of obfuscated JavaScript that, once revealed, showed the email address and password being submitted to compromised WordPress sites and forwarded to an email address found in the body of the script of uzohifeanyi@outlook[.]com. Once attackers have harvested credentials, the JavaScript then redirects the user to the URL of their email address, Anderson wrote.

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HEADLINE	11/18 New Memento ransomware uses WinRAR
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-memento-ransomware-switches-to-winrar-after-failing-at-encryption/?&web_view=true

GIST

A new ransomware group called Memento takes the unusual approach of locking files inside password-protected archives after their encryption method kept being detected by security software.

Last month, the group became active when they began exploiting a VMware vCenter Server web client flaw for the initial access to victims' networks.

The vCenter vulnerability is tracked as ['CVE-2021-21971'](#) and is an unauthenticated, remote code execution bug with a 9.8 (critical) severity rating.

This flaw allows anyone with remote access to TCP/IP port 443 on an exposed vCenter server to execute commands on the underlying OS with admin privileges.

A patch for this flaw came out in February, but as indicated by Memento's operation, numerous organizations have not patched their installs.

This vulnerability has been under exploitation by Memento since April, while in May, a different actor was spotted exploiting it to install XMR miners via PowerShell commands.

Exploiting vCenter to deploy ransomware

Memento launched their ransomware operation last month when they began vCenter to extract administrative credentials from the target server, establish persistence through scheduled tasks, and then use RDP over SSH to spread laterally within the network.

After the reconnaissance stage, the actors used WinRAR to create an archive of the stolen files and exfiltrate it.

Finally, they used Jetico's BCWipe data wiping utility to delete any traces left behind and then used a Python-based ransomware strain for the AES encryption.

However, Memento's original attempts at encrypted files as the systems had anti-ransomware protection, causing the encryption step to be detected and stopped before any damage was done.

A workaround

To overcome the detection of commodity ransomware by security software, Memento came up with an interesting tactic - skip encryption altogether and move files into password-protected archives.

To do this, the group now moves files into WinRAR archives, sets a strong password for access protection, encrypts that key, and finally deletes the original files.

"Instead of encrypting files, the 'crypt' code now put the files in unencrypted form into archive files, using the copy of WinRAR, saving each file in its own archive with a .vaultz file extension," [explains](#) Sophos analyst Sean Gallagher.

"Passwords were generated for each file as it was archived. Then the passwords themselves were encrypted."

The ransom note that is dropped demands the victim pay 15.95 BTC (\$940,000) for complete recovery or 0.099 BTC (\$5,850) per file.

In the cases that Sophos investigated, these extortion attempts haven't led to a ransom payment, as victims used their backups to restore the files.

However, Memento is a new group that has just found an atypical approach that works, so they'll likely try it against other organizations.

	As such, if you're using VMware vCenter Server and/or Cloud Foundation, make sure to update your tools to the latest available version to resolve known vulnerabilities.
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HEADLINE	11/18 Service sunset: 3G goes away next year
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/3g-service-sunset-what-it-means/
GIST	<p>BETTER CALL YOUR grandparents' flip phones now, because they may soon stop ringing.</p> <p>Support for 3G, the 20-year-old wireless network standard, is ending in the US next year, when the major wireless carriers are planning to phase out service. That means many Trac phones, older Kindles, early iPads, and classic Chromebooks—any device operating on 3G—simply won't be able to connect to cellular data networks anymore. The Wi-Fi radios on those devices will still work, but their mobile data capabilities are going kaput.</p> <p>This so-called 3G sunset will come to pass at different times for different wireless providers. AT&T says it's shutting down 3G services in February 2022. T-Mobile recently announced it would extend services to March 31 of next year, but not beyond. Verizon plans to pull the plug in December 2022. Carriers are shutting down 3G service in order to make way for the newer pieces of infrastructure that power the speedier 4G LTE and 5G networks currently expanding across the country.</p> <p>Money is a major motivating factor behind the switch. LTE and 5G networks are just more logistically efficient to operate; get more users on one standard and there are essentially fewer moving parts to futz with. But there are also practical problems with continuing to service 3G customers. The connections operate on different signal frequencies. AT&T, for example, plans to reuse the spectrum that 3G currently runs on to fully enable its 5G capabilities. Without those wavelengths, the 5G signal simply won't be as speedy. In order for the wireless future to flourish, providers say, 3G has to die.</p> <p>"There's really no backward compatibility when we look at LTE compared to 3G," says Will Townsend, principal analyst of networking infrastructure at Moor Insights & Strategy. "That's just because the standard was written 20 to 25 years ago. Unfortunately, when you go through some technology transitions, you don't have backward compatibility. It's just the nature of the way those standards and the architecture provide."</p> <p>Party Lines</p> <p>Chances are this won't mean much for you and your phone. Providers like AT&T and Verizon have long been pushing customers toward devices that run on 4G LTE and 5G. If you've bought a phone in the past decade, it likely has at least 4G connectivity. (Verizon hasn't even activated new phones with 3G for years.) In a perfect world, Townsend says, the transition is a good thing. The grand ambitions of the switch to 5G will mean faster speeds, better architecture, and improved security.</p> <p>In reality, the 5G rollout has been anything but smooth. The process had a slow start, and even now the speediest connections aren't being distributed evenly. A quibble over 5G standards has exacerbated international tensions. Even once they're established, 5G networks aren't perfect. They have security risks of their own. The signal has the potential to interfere with existing equipment, like the instruments used in airplanes. This month, the FAA issued a report outlining how some of the spectrums used in 5G connections could potentially mess with the altimeters used in aerial navigation.</p> <p>For the majority of phone users, the transition will seem like more of a whimper than a bang. But there are 3G stragglers who will be left in the dark when the switch flips, many of them elderly or low income. And the devices they rely on include more than just phones.</p> <p>Many devices within the internet of things—home alarm systems, wearable medical equipment, fire alarms, even ankle monitors—still operate on 3G networks. And 3G devices are used in industries from aviation to trucking.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the hands of the clock must keep turning.</p>

“With any technology progression, there are always going to be resistors, and you can try to mitigate it,” says Jason Leigh, a research manager at the analyst firm IDC. “But at a certain point, you do have to pull the Band-Aid off.”

But that rippage has stung some industries more than others. Groups representing [home security system](#) and [medical monitoring device](#) companies have [expressed their displeasure](#), petitioning the FCC to force AT&T to [delay its transition](#) until the end of 2022. One group, the Alarm Industry Communications Committee, has even gone so far as to call the move [downright murderous](#).

“The requested relief is necessary to avoid the harmful, even deadly, impact this sunset would have on tens of millions of people in millions of homes, businesses, and government installations due to a loss of central station alarm protection service,” the AICC wrote in its petition to the FCC. “Lives will very likely be lost (including many elderly lives) if connectivity is lost.”

Hyperbolic, maybe. But either way, AT&T doesn’t seem to be phased. In response to resistance against the sunset, the company [has written](#) that further delaying things would “throw a monkey wrench into AT&T’s carefully planned 5G transition.” The feud has since gotten ugly. AT&T accuses the AICC of standing in the way of progress. The AICC accuses AT&T of endangering the elderly through negligence. Each side maintains that the other only cares about the financials.

Calling Collect

This kind of transition between wireless generations happens about every 10 years. The old standards stick around for a while and then are gradually phased out. It’s a predictable enough cycle, and one companies can prepare for. That is, unless some world-changing, 18-month-long [public health crisis](#) pops up. The Covid pandemic has disrupted nearly every industry, including those that rely on 3G technologies. The alarm companies, for instance, say that pandemic restrictions kept them from being able to get into people’s homes to upgrade equipment.

“We were confronted with the pandemic, which took many, many months from us, where seniors and individuals would not allow people in their homes or really weren’t focused on an issue like this,” says Daniel Oppenheim, an AICC spokesperson. “Just as these challenges sort of abated to some degree, we now have [supply chain issues](#) around getting products.”

Acknowledging pandemic-induced hardships, most telecom companies have already delayed their 3G sunsets by months to years. Verizon originally began its phaseout of 3G back in 2016, when it announced a target date of 2020. AT&T said the same shortly thereafter. In response to the AICC, AT&T contends that it has done more than enough to prepare customers for the 3G-pocalypse.

“We’re committed to providing our customers with a fast, reliable, and secure network,” an AT&T spokesperson wrote in an email. “These plans are not new, and we have been working with our customers and business clients for more than two years to assist them during this transition.”

“It’s sort of like the whole transition when we went from physical film to digital,” Townsend says. “It’s gonna be painful for some. I think for older folks that aren’t necessarily into the latest and greatest, they might be affected. But I think because the incentives are so compelling from the AT&Ts and the Verizons and whatnot to move people onto the newest technology, from my perspective, it’s not going to be a huge factor.”

Eventually, all things must come to an end. So what does that mean for 4G and 5G? Townsend says not to worry, that 4G is likely to stick around for a long while.

“Each of these generations have been about a decade or more in length,” Townsend says. “There’s plenty of runway here in the future.”

HEADLINE	11/18 Amazon secret: failed to protect your data
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/amazon-failed-to-protect-your-data-investigation/
GIST	<p>ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2018, a row of tech executives filed into a marble- and wood-paneled hearing room and sat down behind a row of tabletop microphones and tiny water bottles. They had all been called to testify before the US Senate Commerce Committee on a dry subject—the safekeeping and privacy of customer data—that had recently been making large numbers of people mad as hell.</p> <p>Committee chair John Thune, of South Dakota, gaveled the hearing to order, then began listing events from the past year that had shown how an economy built on data can go luridly wrong. It had been 12 months since the news broke that an eminently preventable breach at the credit agency Equifax had claimed the names, social security numbers, and other sensitive credentials of more than 145 million Americans. And it had been six months since Facebook was engulfed in scandal over Cambridge Analytica, a political intelligence firm that had managed to harvest private information from up to 87 million Facebook users for a seemingly Bond-villainesque psychographic scheme to help put Donald Trump in the White House.</p> <p>To prevent abuses like these, the European Union and the state of California had both passed sweeping new data privacy regulations. Now Congress, Thune said, was poised to write regulations of its own. “The question is no longer whether we need a federal law to protect consumers' privacy,” he declared. “The question is, what shape will that law take?” Sitting in front of the senator, ready to help answer that question, were representatives from two telecom firms, Apple, Google, Twitter, and Amazon.</p> <p>Notably absent from the lineup was anyone from Facebook or Equifax, which had been grilled by Congress separately. So for the assembled execs, the hearing marked an opportunity to start lobbying for friendly regulations—and to assure Congress that, of course, their companies had the issue completely under control.</p> <p>No executive at the hearing projected quite as much aloof confidence on this count as Andrew DeVore, the representative from Amazon, a company that rarely testifies before Congress. After the briefest of greetings, he began his opening remarks by quoting one of his company's core maxims to the senators: “Amazon's mission is to be Earth's most customer-centric company.” It was a stock line, but it made the associate general counsel sound a bit like he was speaking as an emissary from a larger and more important planet.</p> <p>DeVore, a former prosecutor with rugged features, made clear that what Amazon needed most from lawmakers was minimal interference. Consumer trust was already Amazon's highest priority, and a commitment to privacy and data security was sewn into everything the company did. “We design our products and services so that it's easy for customers to understand when their data is being collected and control when it's shared,” he said. “Our customers trust us to handle their data carefully and sensibly.”</p> <p>On this last point, DeVore was probably making a safe assumption. That year, a study by Georgetown University found Amazon to be the second-most-trusted institution in the United States, after the military. But as companies like Facebook have learned in recent years, public trust can be fragile. And in hindsight, what's most interesting about Amazon's 2018 testimony is what DeVore did not say.</p> <p>At that very moment inside Amazon, the division charged with keeping customer data safe for the company's retail operation was in a state of turmoil: understaffed, demoralized, worn down from frequent changes in leadership, and—by its own leaders' accounts—severely handicapped in its ability to do its job. That year and the one before it, the team had been warning Amazon's executives that the retailer's information was at risk. And the company's own practices were fanning the danger.</p> <p>According to internal documents reviewed by Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting and WIRED, Amazon's vast empire of customer data—its metastasizing record of what you search for, what you buy, what shows you watch, what pills you take, what you say to Alexa, and who's at your front door—had become so sprawling, fragmented, and promiscuously shared within the company that the security division couldn't even map all of it, much less adequately defend its borders.</p>

In the name of speedy customer service, unbridled growth, and rapid-fire “invention on behalf of customers”—in the name of delighting you—Amazon had given broad swathes of its global workforce extraordinary latitude to tap into customer data at will. It was, as former Amazon chief information security officer Gary Gagnon calls it, a “free-for-all” of internal access to customer information. And as information security leaders warned, that free-for-all left the company wide open to “internal threat actors” while simultaneously making it inordinately difficult to track where all of Amazon's data was flowing.

To be clear: This story is not about Amazon Web Services, the cloud-computing wing that manages data for millions of enterprises and government agencies, which has its own, separate information security apparatus. It's about the online retail platform used by hundreds of millions of ordinary consumers. And on that side of Amazon's business, InfoSec staffers warned of an unnerving “inability to detect security incidents.”

By the time DeVore started testifying about Amazon's long-standing commitment to privacy and security, the dangers that the security division had identified weren't just theoretical. According to *Reveal* and *WIRED*'s findings, they were real, and they were pervasive. Across Amazon, some low-level employees were using their data privileges to snoop on the purchases of celebrities, while others were taking bribes to help shady sellers sabotage competitors' businesses, doctor Amazon's review system, and sell knock-off products to unsuspecting customers. Millions of credit card numbers had sat in the wrong place on Amazon's internal network for years, with the security team unable to establish definitively whether they'd been unduly accessed. And a program that allowed sellers to extract their own metrics had become a backdoor for third-party developers to amass Amazon customer data. In fact, not long before September's hearing, Amazon had discovered that a Chinese data firm had been harvesting millions of customers' information in a scheme reminiscent of Cambridge Analytica.

Amazon had thieves in its house and sensitive data streaming out beyond its walls. But DeVore—who had himself received a report that year warning that far too many Amazonians had access to insecurely stored passwords, and who had aggressively shot down a company lawyer for questioning Amazon's reputation on customer privacy—didn't reveal any of that to the senators.

FEW CORPORATIONS MAKE a fetish of their own precepts and rituals quite the way Amazon does.

Jeff Bezos' famous leadership principles—handed out to employees on laminated cards, posted on the walls, recited verbatim—instruct Amazonians to show a “bias for action” because “speed matters in business” (Principle No. 9). They preach “frugality” because “constraints breed resourcefulness, self-sufficiency, and invention” (No. 10). Above all, they hold that Amazon's leaders should “obsess over customers” (No. 1). In the company's early days, Bezos instituted what he called the two-pizza rule: “No team should be so large that it cannot be fed with just two pizzas.” No matter how huge Amazon becomes, the thinking went, it should be able to keep functioning like a bunch of small, flinty startups—albeit ones with instant, unmediated access to the corporation's world-beating data and logistics. That way, Amazon would remain a vibrant place where, to quote another verse of corporate scripture, it is “always day one.”

Another commandment that Bezos laid down in the company's early years was a ban on PowerPoint presentations, arguing that they encouraged shallow, distracted thinking. Instead, he ruled that Amazonians should present their reports to executives in the form of meaty, single-spaced memos—called six-pagers—to be read carefully and silently at the beginning of a meeting by all in attendance.

Over the past several months, *Reveal* and *WIRED* reviewed some of the confidential six-pagers that Amazon's information security chiefs prepared for submission to Jeff Wilke, then the CEO of Amazon's global consumer operation, along with general counsel David Zapolsky and chief financial officer Brian Olsavsky, between 2016 and 2018. This account is based partly on those memos, along with numerous other internal Amazon documents and communications dating back to 2015, as well as interviews with more than a dozen former Amazon data security and privacy staffers, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity because they feared retaliation, reputational damage, or legal threats for speaking openly.

Taken together, these sources show that Amazon's data security problems kept amassing through 2018 as the company grew. They also reveal that, in many ways, the division's overwhelming challenges grew out of the very cultural precepts that Amazon holds dear—and out of the world-devouring growth they helped to foster.

In an emailed statement, Amazon spokesperson Jen Bemisderfer said the company has “an exceptional track record of protecting customer data,” and indicated that these internal documents were a sign of its strong culture. “The fact that Amazon's privacy and security issues are extensively documented with extensive review from senior leadership highlights our commitment to these issues and demonstrates the vigilance with which we identify, escalate, and respond to potential risks,” she wrote. “We've invested billions of dollars over the years to build systems and processes to keep data secure, and are constantly looking for ways to improve.”

For two decades of its early history, Amazon, like a lot of companies, outsourced the storage of its data to a third-party contractor, Oracle. But by the mid-2010s, Amazon's data warehouse there had ballooned to become the biggest Oracle database in the world—as much as 1,000 times bigger than any other, according to one Amazon estimate. It held a staggering 50,000 terabytes of information.

At Amazon, 3,300 small teams—which were represented in one internal map as a celestial orb comprising so many points of light—were tapping into that data every day, all hungry for their own analytics. They had a tendency to grab the data they needed, copy it, and store it elsewhere, according to a 2018 security memo that analyzed the roots of the company's data risks. The result: a “mostly undocumented proliferation of copies of their required data sets.”

That rapid and furious proliferation was, in part, what made it nearly impossible for the information security division to get a handle on Amazon's data. “The increasing number of copies of data sets, combined with Amazon's decentralized accountability and ownership model,” the memo said, saddled the security division with a Sisyphean task. In 2016, in fact, the security team attempted to map all of Amazon's data—and was not able to do so.

By then, Amazon had embarked on a massive, multiyear effort to transfer its Oracle-based data to a new internal system, housed on Amazon Web Services' own servers. (At one point, the guy in charge of that transition—a data warehousing expert named Jeff Carter—described his job in a public presentation by showing a photo of a few men changing the tires of a car tilted precariously on two wheels as it sped down the road.) But there was still data scattered in the wind, untagged, unmapped, untracked.

At the same time, a different stratum of Amazon's empire presented another set of unruly vulnerabilities. Around the world, thousands of Amazon customer service representatives sat in rows of cubicles in call centers or at computers in their own homes. To ensure that they could help customers as quickly as possible, the company gave them the ability to look up nearly anyone's purchase history on command. One former service rep, who requested anonymity, said he remembered colleagues looking up the purchases of Kanye West and movie stars from the Avengers films, even scoping out a few dildos in a particular celebrity's purchase log. Other staffers recalled coworkers looking up exes and girlfriends or boyfriends. “Everybody, everybody did it,” a former customer service manager says. They weren't supposed to, of course. Amazon repeatedly made that clear. In a statement, Amazon's Bemisderfer wrote, “We strongly reject the notion that abuse of these privileges is ‘common.’” But the tools were right there; agents could start a “research session” to look up a customer who wasn't on the phone, then just type in a name.

As early as 2015, executives knew that employees' broad access privileges were a problem at Amazon. But voyeuristic curiosity was the least of their worries. That year, an internal audit, first reported by Politico EU, found that tens of thousands of employees had the ability to “spoof” a seller account—with many of them possessing access to secret keys that allowed them to issue refunds and view customer order histories as if they were the vendor. And according to the auditors' conclusions, 23,000 of them shouldn't have been granted all those powers. Amazon told Politico that, like any company, it audits its policies for compliance

and makes improvements based on these findings. But a 2010 audit had arrived at similar conclusions, and the problems had persisted.

Amazon's system, a much later memo would say, “allows associates to quickly work on behalf of Amazon customers, but puts those same customers at risk from intentional abuse and unintentional exposure by employees and contractors who have been entrusted with elevated privileges.”

But in some ways, one of Amazon's most knotty sources of vulnerability was the information security division itself—and how ill-equipped, dysfunctional, and adrift it was, even as dedicated security staffers performed heroic feats against tall odds. In March 2016, the division's longtime chief, George Stathakopoulos, left for a job at Apple, which sent the team into several months of limbo. But the division's bouts of turmoil would go deeper and last much longer than that.

AROUND THE TAIL end of 2016, a guy named Gary Gagnon—a cybersecurity executive with decades of experience, primarily in federal government work—flew to Seattle to discuss becoming Amazon's new vice president of information security. His last interview of the day was with Wilke, the consumer CEO, who met Gagnon in a small conference room off of his modest office, dressed in a flannel button-down and jeans. The outfit was part of a tradition, Gagnon recalls Wilke explaining: He always dressed like a warehouse worker during the peak holiday shopping season, to remind folks at headquarters of the people who really kept Amazon churning.

Gagnon wasn't that eager for a new job, he says, but he was blown away by Wilke, and how humble he seemed for someone who commanded the largest online retail operation on earth. “OK,” Gagnon remembers thinking, “this is a guy I can work for.”

Everything went downhill from there. At an all-hands meeting in the beginning of 2017, Wilke introduced Gagnon as the security division's new leader, shocking some staffers who had been expecting the acting chief, a longtime insider, to get the job. When Gagnon gave his first speech to his team, his frequent use of the prefix “cyber-” instantly grated on some in the division, who regarded it as the tic of an East Coast government type. “It became a joke from day one,” says one former manager. Gagnon says a staffer later pulled him aside and duly advised him to lay off the term “cybersecurity.”

As he settled into his new role, Gagnon quickly realized that all was not well with “information security”—as he was urged to call it—at Amazon. The size of the company's network was astounding, but “it was all put together with tape and bubblegum,” a tangle of old and new software, Gagnon says. “It grew up out of a garage and it just kept going from there.” New consumer products were locked down with the utmost secrecy before launch, Gagnon says. But otherwise it seemed like everyone on the network had access to nearly everything, including customer information—and yet there was no insider threat program dedicated to preventing rogue employees from abusing their access while he was there. More fundamentally, he says, the team didn't seem to have any systematic way of prioritizing its biggest security risks. “It was shocking to me,” Gagnon says.

He inherited a team of 300-odd people but thought it should have probably been more like 1,000. But when he tried to beef up his staff, Gagnon soon found out that the frugality he'd admired in Wilke was going to pose a problem for him: Upon asking for more resources, he says, the consumer CEO usually turned him down. (Wilke could not be reached for comment.)

The division, Gagnon came to believe, was essentially dead weight in Wilke's profit-and-loss calculation. The information security team over at Amazon Web Services actually generated revenue with products for the cloud division's enterprise customers. But on Wilke's consumer side of the business, Gagnon says, InfoSec was seen as another overhead cost, one that cut into other projects that made Amazon faster, more profitable, and more pleasurable. “The philosophy at Amazon was about customer experience. They wanted to delight the customer,” Gagnon says. “And that was at the expense of everything else.”

Amazon says it “will never sacrifice security for costs.” But in Gagnon's view, investment in information security was spare: “The budgets didn't align with the needs.” Some former security staffers echo him on

this sense of austerity in the division. “I would tell new hires, ‘Assume your budget is zero and go from there. Just be as frugal as you can,’” says Ellie Havens, a former business operations manager on the security team.

In an August 2017 six-pager to Wilke, Gagnon outlined a host of risks that stemmed from Amazon's breakneck growth and his security team's thin resources. New devices connected to Amazon's system were continually being discovered without a centralized system that tracked them all; new fulfillment centers were going up like gangbusters, with warehouse computer security “failing to keep pace”; and payment processing was being expanded to multiple new countries every year, with the security team struggling to keep up.

In the midst of all that expansion, Gagnon wrote, breathtaking things were slipping through the cracks. Just that May, staffers had discovered that, for a period of two years, the names and American Express card numbers of up to 24 million customers had sat exposed on Amazon's internal network, outside a “secure zone” for payment data. It was as if a bank had realized that some sacks of cash had been left in a back office, outside the vault, for several seasons. The exposure was corrected, but the scariest part was that there was no way to be sure whether anyone had snooped on the payment credentials during all that time—because the data set's access logs only went back 90 days. “So we had no idea what the exposure actually was,” Gagnon remembers. “I was astonished by that.” (Bemisderfer says, “There is no evidence to suggest the data was ever exposed outside of our internal system in any way.”)

A more fundamental problem facing Amazon, as Gagnon sized it up in his memo, was this: “We lack visibility into the data we are charged with protecting,” he wrote. “We do not systemically know the data flows and storage locations of sensitive data.”

In security terms, the implication was obvious: If the team didn't know where all the data was, how could they make sure it wasn't leaked, stolen, or manipulated inappropriately? But Gagnon also saw another giant hazard on the horizon. In April 2016 the European Parliament had passed the General Data Protection Regulation, a sweeping consumer privacy law that would go into effect in 2018. After that, firms operating in Europe would be allowed to use people's data under a stringent set of conditions, and sometimes only with their consent. Companies would also be required to make it possible for customers to have their data deleted. “I don't know how the hell we're going to deal with that,” Gagnon remembers thinking, “because we have no idea where our fucking data is.”

But these kinds of privacy concerns didn't seem to be high on the company's list of priorities either. When Gagnon went to David Treadwell, the vice president in charge of Amazon's retail technical infrastructure, to ask how the company was going to handle getting itself into compliance with GDPR, Treadwell's reply, according to Gagnon, was: “What's GDPR?” Gagnon says he was later told not to worry, that the company had hired lawyers to get Amazon ready for the law. “When I brought this up, one of the lawyers from the legal department came into my office and told me to completely back down,” he says.

It wasn't that executives like Wilke didn't care about keeping customer data safe, Gagnon says. “They did what they thought was enough,” he says. “They're making a ton of money. Their stock is going up ... They had no indications that any of the cyber stuff was going to affect their business.” Or at least, it hadn't yet.

In June 2017, at a giddy town hall meeting led by executives from two major American corporations, Whole Foods CEO John Mackey announced that after a “whirlwind courtship” Amazon had decided to purchase the upscale grocer for \$13.7 billion. He described how, in just a matter of weeks, the two companies had gone from their first “blind date” to becoming “officially engaged.” Looking back at the executives' first meeting together, Mackey joked that “it was truly love at first sight.”

The security team at Amazon, which had repeatedly warned of the risks posed by constantly gobbling up new subsidiaries and folding them into the company's network, was less smitten. Less than a week after the shotgun wedding was finalized, an analyst at the credit card processing company First Data called an Amazon employee with an ominous tip. A Ukrainian broker had just put some credit card data for sale on the dark web that could indicate a breach at Whole Foods.

Amazon's security division jumped into action, alerting Whole Foods and launching an investigation. Over the next few weeks, the team determined that a notorious group of Ukrainian cybercriminals had been inside parts of the Whole Foods corporate network since January. The attackers had control of 20 employee accounts with powerful levels of access. They had burrowed so deep that the Whole Foods team working on the breach had to be moved to an entirely different email system to communicate without fear of the hackers snooping, according to an internal memo.

Once the security division kicked out the attackers, Amazon notified customers that hackers had made off with credit card details for purchases made at some restaurants and taprooms inside the grocery chain's stores. The hackers hadn't made the jump from Whole Foods into the larger Amazon network, but it still wasn't a good look. The breach made headlines.

With customer loyalty and trust at stake, the breach might have supplied an opportunity for Gagnon to make the case for more investment in security. But he wouldn't be sticking around much longer. In October 2017, just a month after the Whole Foods breach, Gagnon and a slew of other staffers flew to London for ZonCon, Amazon's invite-only information security conference, an event for team building and recruiting. Gagnon didn't make it through the conference.

His fate was sealed one night at a private dinner for the event's speakers. Precisely what happened there is under dispute, but Gagnon never returned to work for Amazon. The next day, he says, he was pulled into a video call with Treadwell back in Seattle, who told him to leave the conference and fly home. When he got back to the States, Gagnon says, he was told that what happened in London was “inexcusable” without receiving any additional detail. He was fired the following week, the company confirmed.

Whatever really took place, the upshot for the division was more instability. “We went back to Lord of the Flies,” says a former Amazon security manager. “It was just a shit show.” The team was leaderless again after less than a year. With chaos at the top, other senior staffers and managers would leave too, leaving the group unsettled and lacking institutional memory. Projects got derailed, and security would lose its top advocate in high-level meetings, former staffers say. The division's teams would hunker down in silos, sometimes fighting among themselves and operating without a strategic vision. As the search dragged on, some staffers began to wonder why it was so hard to find a new chief. “We couldn't find anybody for the longest time,” says Havens. “I think word had gotten out that it wasn't an easy place to work in security.”

Finally, Amazon moved another leader into the top information security role—someone who had at least proven himself inside the company. The division's new chief was Jeff Carter, the guy who had orchestrated Amazon's monumental data migration from Oracle to Amazon Web Services. But there was a hitch: Carter didn't have experience in data security. As he himself would later joke in a presentation, viewable on YouTube, his reaction to the job offer was to say, “Uh, this doesn't seem like an entry-level job for a security person.”

It wasn't. Around the time Carter arrived, a set of managers inside the information security division got together to quantify their alarm over the biggest dangers Amazon was facing. Each danger was assigned three scores: One for how badly it could affect the company, one for how likely it was to happen, and one for what power Amazon had to control it. Then those three numbers were multiplied together for a total risk score.

Atop the security team's list was the danger that breaches would “go unnoticed” due to “limited detections, alert fatigue, and manual effort.” The impact of such a scenario, the managers determined, could be “critical” (5 out of 5), its probability was “very likely” (5 out of 5), and the team had “no controls” against the company's exposure to it (5 out of 5). Total risk score: 125 out of 125.

Next up, the managers evaluated the danger that “lack of visibility into systems and networks” would create an “inability to detect security incidents.” Risk score: 125 out of 125. Then there was Amazon's “inability” to protect secret credentials and keys that could unlock sensitive data: 125 out of 125. Then came Amazon's “inability to identify the location of data.” 125 out of 125 again.

Amazon says these risks were “overstated.” But around that same time, yet another dire-sounding message issued from a unit inside the security division called the Security Operations Center, which was responsible for detecting and responding to attacks. A memo from the team warned that, because the group relied on humans to report problems when they came upon them instead of having an effective automated system to proactively search for evidence of a breach, an attacker could conceivably hide out in Amazon's network for years without being noticed.

Amazon claims this memo ignored “multiple compensating controls and fallback measures” that the company had in place to prevent intruders. Still, the document's urgency was palpable: “We can't scale with people, there are just not enough so we must scale with automation.” But automation, the memo went on, was “currently underfunded.”

As Carter settled into his new job, in short, the alarms sounding within the information security division were cranked up as high as they could go. Elsewhere in the company, meanwhile, another group of staffers had been boiling over with their own concerns about Amazon's handling of customer data.

GARY GAGNON WASN'T the only one who blanched at the thought of preparing the company to comply with Europe's GDPR. At a time when the world was growing increasingly concerned about tech companies' use of personal data—not just whether they kept it safe from cybercriminals, but how they themselves passed it around and milked it for profit—Amazon had only a small handful of employees who were officially charged with ensuring customer privacy across the organization. Most of them were clustered in the company's legal department under associate general counsel Bill Way. And throughout 2017 they struggled to advocate for privacy in a company that hated to slow down, where executives often seemed not to appreciate their efforts.

In May 2017, a senior engineer among this small group of staffers sent an email to Way sketching the general lay of the land: Addressing privacy issues around the company had become “a brutal game of whack-a-mole,” he wrote.

“I've had several conversations with internal employees that were not happy with the transparency and privacy practices of tools they were developing, but attempts to fix this were knocked down by leadership,” the engineer wrote. “Of course, these individuals have to take their career into account before fighting against their reporting chain too much on those issues, and it points to the need for a centralized privacy team to handle those escalations and battles.”

Other tech giants, the engineer wrote, had more mature systems in place for working through complex privacy issues, and Amazon was falling behind. (Google, for instance, had scores of employees working on privacy.) “Without a privacy development team to own that work,” he concluded, “I'm not sure we are well positioned to catch up.”

In the fall of 2017, a different staffer—an Amazon compliance expert—wrote a memo to Way and others warning that the company could face multibillion-dollar fines over privacy issues if it didn't shape up. The memo argued that Amazon should aim to have more than 30 dedicated privacy staffers instead of just a handful, and said the company offered few to no resources for privacy training, the development of products for privacy, or data mapping. (That staffer later alleged that he was pushed out of the company in part for raising these issues, according to records reviewed by WIRED and Reveal. Politico EU also reported on allegations that the company punished staffers for raising security concerns. “Employees did not face retaliation,” Amazon says. “No employees left the company because they had raised concerns around data security regulation compliance.”)

Later that year, when members of Amazon's legal team tried to help the company up its privacy game, their efforts, too, were shot down. That December, a company lawyer polled a group of colleagues on whether Amazon should join the International Association of Privacy Professionals. Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter, Oracle, and Salesforce had already become corporate members, giving hundreds of their employees access to its resources. A top-tier corporate membership cost \$25,000.

“It's a relatively cheap way for the company to keep our privacy professionals connected into that network and to show that the company is sensitive to and thoughtful about privacy issues generally, instead of being mostly conspicuous by our absence,” wrote a Japan-based Amazon lawyer in the thread.

But Andrew DeVore—the associate general counsel who would ultimately testify before Congress about Amazon's “long-standing commitment to privacy and data security,” and the most senior person on the chain—batted the idea away: “I don't think it's a particularly useful forum for us to achieve any broader privacy objectives.”

Other lawyers tried to argue back, but it didn't go well. “It is a very uncomfortable situation to be present at IAPP events as a private member,” wrote an Amazon attorney based in Germany, “while it is clear that I am working for a company that is perceived as not being interested in privacy issues.”

That set DeVore off.

“Anyone—and in particular anyone who purports to have any real involvement in or understanding of privacy issues—who believes Amazon is ‘not interested in privacy issues’ is a complete and utter ignoramus,” he replied. “We wouldn't be here, and we would not have the incredible array of privacy protective products and services that we make available around the world, if we weren't absolutely privacy obsessed in all we do. We have been from day one, and it [is] still day one. So I hope, and fully expect, that all of you push back hard on that kind of crap.”

Amazon didn't join the privacy organization. Amazon Web Services, the cloud computing wing, later did. One former Amazon lawyer who worked on getting the company ready for GDPR argues that DeVore's contention that the company designed its products with privacy in mind is simply inaccurate. At the time, “Amazon didn't have meaningful controls to limit access and sharing of user personal data, including sensitive data, within the company,” the lawyer says. “Within Amazon, user personal data flowed like a river.”

As the May 2018 deadline for complying with GDPR drew closer, the issue of data privacy surged to the forefront of public attention—courtesy of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which erupted that March. Suddenly morning news shows and nighttime comedy hosts were chewing over a convoluted story about a third-party developer who took liberties with data freely acquired through Facebook's application programming interface. In a matter of days, Facebook's market cap dropped by more than \$35 billion.

Inside Amazon, privacy staffers feared their company could careen into its own submerged iceberg of a privacy scandal. After all, Amazon wasn't even doing much to steer clear of the giant glacial mass that was looming right in front of it: Europe's new privacy regime, which threatened fines in the many millions of dollars. Finally, with only five weeks before the May 25, 2018, enforcement deadline, “the decision was made” to create a privacy team to help prepare the world's largest online retailer for the new law, according to a July 2018 information security memo.

Amazon says that it has always had privacy staffers distributed across the company, that it “began planning for GDPR years in advance” and simply opted to centralize its efforts in the run-up to the deadline. But months later, in front of the Senate Commerce Committee, DeVore still seemed miffed that the European law had distracted Amazon from its customer-centric priorities. “Our long-standing commitment to privacy aligned us well with the principles of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation,” DeVore said. “Meeting its specific requirements for the handling, retention, and deletion of personal data required us to divert significant resources to administrative tasks—and away from invention on behalf of customers.”

Considering DeVore's testimony, Gary Gagnon has a hard time stomaching the claim that Amazon was well-aligned with GDPR and had privacy at its core. “It's all bullshit,” he says. “Complete bullshit.”

IN THE SPRING and summer of 2018, Amazon looked like an unstoppable force with a brick on its accelerator. The company had over 575,000 global employees. Jeff Bezos had been declared the world's richest man, and Amazon was on the verge of becoming the world's second company, after Apple, to reach a value of \$1 trillion. As Bezos reported in his annual shareholder letter that April, more than 100 million people around the world had become Prime members, and they were going bonkers for smart devices like Echo Dots and Fire TV Sticks—products that turned their daily lives into ever more Amazon data points.

It was at this moment of relative triumph that a dam seemed to break. In a rush, the vulnerabilities that Amazon's security division had been flagging were manifesting in a series of gut-wrenching discoveries.

One day in late May, Amazon's risk intelligence team stumbled on a sketchy-looking service that was being offered to Amazon's third-party sellers—a business scheme that harvested Amazon data in ways that were, in some respects, evocative of Facebook's Cambridge Analytica debacle. Called AMZReview, the service advertised itself as a way to help sellers boost their rankings on the Amazon platform, and it claimed to possess detailed information on millions of Amazon customers. As the team investigated, they discovered a disturbing truth about how the folks at AMZReview had gotten their hands on all that customer data: Amazon had let them have it, according to a draft of a memo that detailed the team's findings.

Amazon's retail platform had long offered sellers a convenient program that allowed them to pull data about their customers. All they needed was a special key to tap into Amazon's interface, and they could unlock access to customers' information, including names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, the products they'd ordered, and the dates when they'd ordered them. The idea was that sellers could use all that data to manage their businesses, possibly by hiring their own software developers to build analytics tools.

The problem was that third-party companies, hungry for data to monetize, had realized they could collect the keys from many different sellers and amass huge pools of customer information without customers' knowledge. This door had been wide open for years, with companies gaining easy access to Amazon customer data, until the intel team discovered AMZReview.

In exchange for access to all the customer data that Amazon provided, AMZReview offered to help sellers attain a crucial piece of information that Amazon strictly withheld: the personal email addresses attached to customers and their reviews. Bad reviews can sink a business on Amazon, but with the right email addresses, sellers could induce dissatisfied customers to take their reviews down, or entice people to leave good ones with special offers.

How did AMZReview know those email addresses? The service, Amazon determined, was an offshoot of a Chinese analytics firm called TouchData, and it seemed to have obtained the customer emails from “other open and breached sources” of data on the internet. From there, it had ways of matching addresses to Amazon reviews, with a modest success rate. In all, AMZReview obtained access keys from 92 different sellers, allowing it to pull all of their customer information from Amazon's system. It claimed to have information on 16 million Amazon customers. (The intel team said it was able to verify only that AMZReview had likely harvested the information of 4.8 million. TouchData denies that it was ever connected to AMZReview, which is no longer active.)

When the risk intel team first reported the discovery up the chain, “the color was draining from people's faces,” says one person involved in the meetings. “It was a fucking shitstorm.”

The problem was far bigger than just AMZReview, which was only one player among many that could harvest data from the information Amazon gave to sellers. Merchants accessed billions of customer orders through Amazon's interface with little oversight. The largest third-party developer had access to a billion orders. Sure, there were rules for how sellers and developers were supposed to use the system. But it appeared, the memo said, that more than half of the third-party developers the company had researched were violating Amazon's terms of service. A former staffer familiar with the details says that most were probably legitimate businesses. But still, the former employee adds, “there was a massive hole. It was really unmitigated.”

The memo said Amazon had been “oversharing” customer details, handing out many different kinds of data points, often without regard to what sellers actually needed. And Amazon had “no way of knowing,” the memo said, if the data was being accessed by actual sellers or by third-party companies who were doing who knows what with it. The companies could be selling the data outright or using it to create targeted marketing aimed at Amazon customers. “We believe such use could violate customer trust if customers understood what was happening,” it said.

Amazon's leaders wanted the problem solved, and fast. The memo set forth a plan: Amazon would limit the data shared with sellers. It would regularly audit the companies that were pulling data to catch any misconduct. As for the massive amount of data that had already leaked out, they decided to simply ask the biggest companies to please get rid of their historical data on Amazon customers. Amazon says it used external audits to make sure the data was trashed.

“The biggest concern was just optics,” says a former Amazon employee who had knowledge of the situation. “If it had come out that that was happening? All that embarrassing shit that you ordered on Amazon, there's some Chinese company that could pin down the date you bought it? Obviously they wouldn't want anyone to know about that.”

Some people involved couldn't help but think of the still-broiling Cambridge Analytica scandal. But while Facebook got publicly barbecued, Amazon dealt with AMZReview quietly. Some privacy advocates say the company should have come clean. “They should have said, ‘Here's what is going on, here's what we did to fix it, and here's what we know about who got their hands on your data,’” says Bennett Cyphers, a staff technologist at the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Amazon says there's nothing to see here. “There was not a data leak,” says company spokesperson Jen Bemisderfer. “We have strict policies and contractual terms in place that prohibit the misuse of customer data by sellers and service providers, and we continuously monitor and audit our systems to detect misuse and enforce our policies.” When Amazon discovered companies abusing their access, it cut them off, she says. Amazon also invested in an outside auditor to make sure companies comply. As for how many customers had their information shoveled up by companies misusing the system, Amazon had “no response.”

As bad as it was, AMZReview wasn't the only problem the company discovered that May. At almost exactly the same time, Amazon's security division learned that several Amazon accounts belonging to employees in China had been used to bypass controls in the company's customer service platform. According to an internal memo, those accounts had then changed the email addresses attached to some 36,000 customer profiles, a move that would have allowed the attackers to take over the customer accounts and use them for fraud. Eight employees, including an IT engineer, were potentially involved and appeared to be in league with Chinese companies that provide services to Amazon sellers. Several employees were fired, according to the memo, and a technology team corrected the vulnerability that had been used to change email addresses within days of its discovery.

The security division also learned that someone inside Amazon's system had logged in to 6,581 customer accounts and deleted reviews they'd written. The two incidents appeared related. Someone was gaming one of the world's biggest marketplaces, and they had inside help.

When Jeff Carter—the new security chief who didn't have security experience—was ready to submit his first quarterly six-pager to senior execs in July 2018, he started by capturing the still-bedraggled state of the security division. “Through various management transitions, there has been a breakdown in trust amongst teams within the InfoSec organization, which has impacted teamwork, morale, productivity and retention,” he wrote in the memo. While everything else about Amazon seemed to be growing exponentially, the security team had lost even more people. At 345 staffers, it was down 100 from its budgeted headcount.

Carter went on to sound many of the same alarms that his predecessors had: Amazon still didn't know where all of its data was. The company still didn't have nearly enough capacity to detect threats automatically. And it still gave its employees far too much access to sensitive customer data. The difference was that for Carter, the danger posed by Amazon's own employees—"the ability for a rogue employee to abuse internal systems for their own purposes," as he put it—had now become a vivid reality. And it would only become more grotesquely so as 2018 dragged on.

WHEN ANNA LAM was a young girl growing up on the Pacific island of Nauru, her mother would sometimes drop a piece of cool-green jade into a cup of herbal tea to calm her childhood fears. As a middle-aged adult living in New York City decades later, Lam started a business selling beauty products, some of them made from the same green semiprecious stone. Her most popular item on Amazon was something called a jade roller: a small cosmetic tool that looks a bit like an attractive miniature paint roller, designed for massaging one's face. To market the product under her brand, GingerChi, Lam put up some artfully staged close-ups of her own daughter using one of the rollers.

Jade rollers have an ancient Chinese pedigree, but in the mid-2010s it was their cachet on Instagram that made them hugely popular. By the fall of 2017, the living room of Lam's apartment was cluttered with boxes for shipping her rollers to customers. That's when she first noticed something weird on Amazon: Her daughter's face had shown up on a listing for someone else's jade roller. A rival seller called Krasr had grabbed Lam's photos to help sell their own copycat product. Lam reported the apparent violation to Amazon, and the photos were taken down.

Two months later, Lam received an order from a Canadian customer named Mohamed Multahzim Akbar Ali and realized he was the owner of the Krasr trademark. So she decided not to fulfill the order but didn't spare it much more thought. She was too busy dealing with her company's skyrocketing popularity. That November, the actress Lea Michele had plugged Lam's GingerChi jade roller on Instagram. Then Lam's products made the 2017 holiday gift guides for Time Out New York and Us Weekly. "It just went like wildfire," she says. And then after that, "all hell broke loose."

That spring, mysterious sellers on Amazon started issuing copyright infringement complaints against Lam, which prompted Amazon to suspend her account. She tried emailing her accusers but never heard back, so she suspected that Krasr was behind the complaints. Krasr had also relaunched his own jade roller with a marketing push.

When Lam finally managed to get her account reinstated, months later, her own Amazon listing seemed to turn against her, as if possessed: Customers would order a GingerChi jade roller, but they would sometimes receive a Krasr-branded roller in the mail instead, and their credit card payments would go to Lam's rival. The Krasr rollers looked similar to Lam's product, down to the cloth bag and informational insert, but they were sometimes defective. So Krasr got the sale, customers got an off-putting bait-and-switch, and Lam got the bad reviews. ("Everything about this is suspicious," one GingerChi reviewer wrote after receiving a Krasr-branded roller that didn't roll.)

With time, the hijackers on her listing multiplied: A rotating cast of other sellers purported to offer her GingerChi jade roller right from her own page. One of them was mockingly named KingerChi. Lam tried to enlist Amazon's help. She'd order the rollers off her page, take pictures showing they were not hers, and send complaints to Amazon. After a long wait, one or two sellers peddling copycat rollers disappeared, but others would pop up, stealing her orders. Lam hired lawyers to write pleading letters to the company. By now she was losing money, had laid off an employee, and worried her business would go under. After a while, she couldn't help but think that Amazon simply didn't care.

Krasr, after all, had been the subject of a long exposé on CNBC in the fall of 2017. The story identified Ali by name and described how, for more than six months, Krasr had attacked a Los Angeles-based skin care business, seeming to infiltrate and sabotage its Amazon account in a series of moves that were sometimes uncannily similar to what was now happening to Lam. The story quoted hectoring text messages from a Krasr representative to the seller, claiming to be the "virus of Amazon" and threatening war.

Amazon's response to the story was to quote corporate scripture, saying that the company “is constantly innovating on behalf of customers and sellers” and that it moves quickly whenever it detects bad actors abusing its systems. And yet almost a year after the CNBC story appeared, Krasr was still attacking Lam with impunity.

The man behind Krasr, meanwhile, seemed to be living large. Ali—or Zim, as he called himself—was in his early twenties at the time, getting a computer science degree at the University of Toronto. His Instagram account showed a confident, fashionable young man with a penchant for world travel, scuba diving in one post and riding a camel in another. At one point he attended a conference designed to help Canadian businesses tap into Chinese ecommerce, where he snapped a photo of Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau onstage. (Ali did not respond to multiple requests for comment.)

As he targeted GingerChi, Krasr ran a smorgasbord of other product lines, hawking everything from ultrasonic pest-repellent devices to anti-snoring aids on Amazon. Some of his customers left reviews saying they were offered money or freebies to delete bad reviews. Lam didn't understand how Amazon let him get away with attacking sellers for so long. Surely Krasr had to be on the company's radar.

Lam didn't know, of course, how patchy Amazon's radar actually was. But Krasr eventually caught the company's attention. In November 2018, Krasr featured prominently in one of the security division's memos, a draft of Carter's quarterly six-pager to Wilke and other top execs. The security team had uncovered the disturbing secret of Krasr's success: He had moles inside of Amazon. “This seller recruited our employees over LinkedIn and Facebook,” the memo said. Over a series of years, these insiders had received approximately \$160,000 in payoffs. In return, they used their access privileges to offer him godlike powers over the platform and any seller he wished to target.

Krasr's moles leaked him information on customers and their orders, shared internal business reports, and handed over information on best-selling products so Krasr could copy them (a move that Amazon itself has been accused of using to beat out its independent sellers). At Krasr's direction, they would reinstate accounts that had been suspended for illicit activity. And at times they would block sellers who were in good standing, just so that Krasr—in the manner of a ransom scheme—could offer to help.

According to Carter's memo, Amazon had caught seven of the employees who were working with Krasr, and they had spilled their secrets. All of them had been fired. But Krasr himself proved elusive. Amazon had referred him to the FBI, the memo said. “We believe Krasr is traveling between Toronto and Thailand and have retained a private investigator to confirm his whereabouts,” the memo stated. (“Any marketplace with a good amount of activity is going to have bad actors try to take advantage,” says Bemisderfer.)

Krasr had finally rattled Amazon's security leaders, but he wasn't an isolated case. The team also discovered an employee in China who had shared confidential information with a data broker, who then sold it on the Chinese messaging service WeChat, according to the memo. Plus they found an employee in China who offered a bribe to an employee in India to help certain sellers.

To make matters worse for Amazon, word of the company's corruption problem was beginning to get out. In fall 2018, The Wall Street Journal reported that employees there were slinging data for cash and that one was fired for leaking customer emails to a seller.

In response to the Journal stories, Amazon launched an internal project, codenamed Glass Door, to develop ways to fix the problem. But security leaders weren't particularly optimistic: “These threat actors are financially motivated and will remain persistent at acquiring our data,” a draft of a memo from Carter to Amazon's execs said, “until the financial burden on the attacker is greater than their financial gain.”

IN JANUARY 2020, after just over a year and a half in the role, Carter left his job running Amazon's information security department. His exit sent the division into yet another several months of floundering without a chief.

Amazon eventually hired John “Four” Flynn to fill the role. Flynn arrived from Uber, where he had served as chief information security officer during a period when employees there were using their data privileges to track the movements of ex-girlfriends and celebrities like Beyoncé. Those abuses came to light not because Uber disclosed them but because a whistleblower filed a lawsuit against the company—and alleged, in that suit, that he was fired in part for raising his concerns with Flynn. (Uber said it maintains strict policies to protect customer data and that it fired fewer than 10 employees for improper access. The lawsuit ended in a settlement.)

Flynn was also at Uber when the company hushed up a massive hack of user data. Around the time Flynn was hired at Amazon last year, his old boss at Uber, security chief Joseph Sullivan, was indicted for allegedly paying off hackers to keep the data breach hidden from the public and federal authorities. Flynn, who hasn't been accused of any wrongdoing, testified before Congress that he wasn't involved in the payout. “I think we made a misstep in not reporting to consumers,” he told lawmakers. “And I think we made a misstep in not reporting to law enforcement.”

At Amazon, Flynn inherits some of the same problems that plagued Carter. Shady online services still openly advertise their ability to provide insider access for a fee. Many promise to provide internal screenshots of Amazon's system, one advertising them for \$175, or customer emails. Photos of a laptop open to Amazon's internal seller support portal, reviewed by Reveal and WIRED, showed the location data of the exact spot in India where the images were taken last year.

In September 2020, federal prosecutors indicted six people in a scheme to bribe Amazon employees, saying the conspiracy had continued from at least 2017 to 2020. The trial is slated for next year. Some industry consultants say the problem of employee corruption is as bad as ever. But Amazon says it strongly rejects the notion that it has a problem with bribery.

Amazon also told Reveal and WIRED that it would “continue to enforce and remove seller accounts who have relations with Mohamed Multhazim Akbar Ali should any of these surface in the future.” But in fact, Krasr has been back in action for some time. Ali has a new company, ZB Ventures, which Reveal and WIRED were able to connect to more than 20 brands peddling everything from beard straighteners to massage guns on Amazon (some even earning an “Amazon's Choice” label). The brands' product pages are also littered with reviews from customers who say they were promised free upgrades in exchange for positive reviews—a practice that violates Amazon's policies.

Ali himself is still in the wind. “I have over 8 different online businesses which are mostly automated,” he says in his profile on the Couchsurfing social network, “so I'm free most days to help, explore, and enjoy life.”

Amazon's security division carries a much heavier burden. Bemisderfer writes that the memos and emails discussed in this article are “old documents” that “do not reflect Amazon's current security posture,” and some security staffers who have left the company tend to agree. The division is making some progress, they say. Amazon's systems for automatically detecting threats—an area where the company says it has made investments—are indeed constantly improving. The company says it has made significant investments in tools that identify “where personal data is stored and how it flows” and procedures that give employees “access to only the data that is critical to complete a particular assignment.” But on the whole, former employees say, the security division is still adrift.

“It's going to take forever to turn that ship,” says one former security manager. What Amazon does well is build new things quickly, the former manager says; what it doesn't do well is solve complex problems that take multiple teams and years to address. Meanwhile, the bloodletting continues, as the division keeps losing experienced security pros through attrition. The lineup of executives who receive Flynn's six-pagers has also changed: Jeff Wilke retired from Amazon in March 2021.

Meanwhile, Amazon's vast attack surface of customer data, and its potential pool of “internal threat actors,” have both grown at a rate that is nearly incomprehensible. Just since DeVore's testimony in 2018,

the company has doubled its number of Prime members, to 200 million. It has also more than doubled its number of employees worldwide, to nearly 1.5 million.

The company has achieved huge scale in another sense as well: In August 2021, true to the warnings of Amazon's privacy staffers, officials in Luxembourg levied \$883 million in fines against the company for GDPR violations, a penalty more than twice as large as all prior GDPR fines against other companies put together. (Amazon says the decision relates to the advertising that it shows European customers. The company strongly disagrees with the ruling and is appealing it.)

Still, public faith in Amazon has remained high. In July 2020, a year before he too stepped down as CEO, Jeff Bezos testified before Congress for the first time ever, to defend Amazon against growing antitrust sentiment in Washington. (In a social media post before the hearing, Ali scoffed at the idea that lawmakers would ever rein Bezos in. "He's definitely above the law," the man behind Krass wrote. "Nothing can be done about it.") In his opening remarks to Congress, Bezos nodded to some of the now-plentiful studies that find Amazon to be one of the most trusted institutions in America. "Who do Americans trust more than Amazon to do the right thing?" he asked the committee. "Only their doctors and the military." But as he added in his statement, "Customer trust is hard to win and easy to lose." Is Amazon worthy of it?

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HEADLINE	11/18 States investigate Instagram: young at risk
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/nov/18/instagram-investigation-teenagers-children-facebook
GIST	<p>A bipartisan coalition of US state attorneys general has opened an investigation into Facebook for promoting Instagram to children despite the company's own awareness of its potential harms.</p> <p>The investigation, which involves at least eight states, comes as Facebook faces increasing scrutiny over its approach to children and young adults. Documents leaked by a former employee turned whistleblower recently revealed the company's own internal research showed the platform negatively affected the mental health of teens, particularly regarding body image issues.</p> <p>The investigation will cover whether the company violated consumer protection laws and put young people at risk and will be led by a coalition of attorneys general from California, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, Tennessee and Vermont.</p> <p>"For too long, Meta has ignored the havoc that Instagram is wreaking on the mental health and wellbeing of our children and teens," said California's attorney general, Rob Bonta, in an emailed statement.</p> <p>"Enough is enough. We've undertaken this nationwide investigation to get answers about Meta's efforts to promote the use of this social media platform to young Californians – and to determine if, in doing so, Meta violated the law."</p> <p>Facebook, now known as Meta, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>In September, the company said it was pausing its plans for a version of Instagram designed for kids, amid growing opposition to the project.</p> <p>Facebook has continued to face blowback over the internal documents leaked by its former employee Frances Haugen. In September, the company's global head of safety faced a grilling from US lawmakers about the impacts of the company's products on children, and last month a global alliance of child protection campaigners and experts sent a letter to Mark Zuckerberg urging him to share the company's research on the topic.</p> <p>Facebook has said the leaked documents have been used to paint a false picture of the company's work. In May, a group of more than 40 state attorneys general wrote to the company asking it to abandon plans for the kids-focused app.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Facebook orders LAPD stop fake accounts
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/facebook-lapd-social-media-surveillance-fake-accounts
GIST	<p>Facebook is demanding that the Los Angeles police department cease all use of “dummy” accounts on its platforms and stop collecting data on users for surveillance.</p> <p>The letter, addressed to the LAPD chief, Michel Moore, on Thursday, comes after the Guardian contacted Facebook about two stories that revealed the department partnered in 2019 with Voyager Labs, a tech company that claims it can predict “emerging threats” and solve crime by analyzing social media information such as a person’s friends, posts and usernames.</p> <p>Documents obtained by the Brennan Center and reviewed by the Guardian show that in addition to enabling law enforcement clients to collect and analyze user data from companies like Facebook, Voyager software also enables its law enforcement clients to use fake accounts to access otherwise inaccessible and private user information.</p> <p>Facebook says both these uses are violations of its policies. The LAPD did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>“It has also come to our attention that the LAPD has used a third-party vendor to collect data on our platforms regarding our users,” the letter reads. “Under our policies, developers are prohibited from using data obtained on our platforms for surveillance, including the processing of platform data about people, groups, or events for law enforcement or national security purposes.”</p> <p>It’s unclear if the LAPD used the fake profile feature while working with Voyager. Emails show an LAPD technology official said the feature that allows police to “log in with fake accounts that are already friended with the target subject” was a “great function”, but suggested that the department was not heading in the direction of using that service. Documents also suggest that some LAPD staffers who were testing Voyager’s services had requested the “active persona” feature for Facebook, Instagram and Telegram, appearing to refer to the fake account function.</p> <p>In a September 2019 email, an LAPD official in the robbery and homicide division told Voyager that the fake profile service was a “need-to-have” feature.</p> <p>The documents the Brennan Center obtained through public records requests included an LAPD video that instructed officers on how to preserve Facebook and Instagram accounts and recommended officers use fake profiles to do so. “Remember, don’t use your personal account as you may pop up on the suspect’s feed as friends you may know,” the detective in the video said. “Make sure to set up a dummy account. It’s easy to set up a dummy account and if you need help you can always refer to your local area detectives.”</p> <p>LAPD has policies for “online undercover activity” that establish some restrictions for this tactic, including requiring special approval from a supervisor if police are using a fake account to communicate with someone, but there is less oversight if an account is created to examine “trends” or for “conducting research”. The policies say that “the use of a fictitious online persona to engage in investigative activity” is not subject to an approval by the police commission, an oversight board that grants approval for other kinds of undercover operations.</p> <p>The records show that the LAPD has had conversations this year about a continued partnership with Voyager, but a police spokesperson told the Guardian on Monday that the department was not currently using the software.</p> <p>In its letter, Facebook reiterated using fake accounts was a violation of their policies and said the LAPD should “cease all activities on Facebook that involve the use of fake accounts, impersonation of others, and collection of data for surveillance purposes.”</p>

	<p>“People on our platforms speak their minds, connect with others to promote common causes, share their personal experiences, and organize first amendment protected activities,” the letter, signed by the company’s the vice-president and deputy general counsel of civil rights, Roy L Austin Jr, read. “It is our intention that they do so in a space that is free from unlawful surveillance by the government or agents acting in inauthentic ways.”</p> <p>This is at least the second time that Facebook has had to demand a police department cease its use of fake social media profiles as part of its investigations. In 2018 Facebook deactivated accounts used by police in Memphis, Tennessee, under fake names. One account, under the name Bob Smith, was used to befriend and gather information on activists. At the time, Facebook told the police department it needed to “cease all activities on Facebook that involve the use of fake accounts or impersonation of others”.</p> <p>“There’s no excuse for LAPD not to have known this,” said Rachel Levinson-Waldman, a deputy director at the Brennan Center, adding that she hoped Facebook’s letter to the LAPD would serve as a warning to other police departments and software companies that law enforcement cannot conduct surveillance or undercover operations on Facebook’s platforms.</p> <p>“This is really important to help ensure the protection of activists for racial justice and social justice,” she said, noting that these kinds of social media surveillance programs disproportionately affect organizers of color. “These are basic civil rights protections of not having police officers or detectives infiltrate groups undercover online in a way that can be really hard to unearth.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 US indicts 2 Iranians: intimidate voters
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/us/politics/iranian-hackers-voter-intimidation-indicted.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Justice Department indicted two Iranian hackers on Thursday for seeking to influence the 2020 election with a clumsy effort to intimidate voters, just a day after the nation’s cyberdefense authorities warned of an escalating Iranian effort to insert malicious code into the computer networks of hospitals and other critical infrastructure.</p> <p>The hackers, identified in a grand jury indictment handed up in New York as Seyyed Kazemi, 24, and Sajjad Kashian, 27, are accused of sending threatening messages to several thousand voters, after breaking into some voter registration systems and at least one media company. Many of the messages sent by the Iranians were designed to look like they were from the Proud Boys, the right-wing extremist group.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials said Facebook messages and emails from the Iranians to Republicans falsely claimed the Democrats were planning to exploit security vulnerabilities in state voter databases to register nonexistent voters. But the hackers also sent tens of thousands of emails to Democrats. They demanded recipients change their party affiliation and vote for President Donald J. Trump.</p> <p>The emails were so badly written, however, that they immediately seemed suspect, and the effort was quickly exposed by Mr. Trump’s own administration. Intelligence officials have long considered the emails to Democrats to be a bit of ham-handed reverse psychology, meant to make the recipients more likely to turn out to vote against Mr. Trump.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials also revealed Thursday that the Iranians had hacked into a media company that provides a content management system for dozens of newspapers, although officials did not reveal the name of the organization.</p> <p>Had they kept access, they might have been able to post fake stories to undermine the election, law enforcement officials said. But the F.B.I. detected the intrusion and notified the company. When the Iranians tried to enter the system the day after the election, they discovered their access was blocked.</p> <p>While the timing seemed coincidental, the indictment was announced after the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security, issued a bulletin on Wednesday warning of a broad, state-sponsored Iranian campaign to get into American computer</p>

networks, including hospitals. The warning was a rare one: The governments of Australia and Britain joined in issuing it, and said that a number of ransomware attacks were being organized by the Iranian government, not just criminal groups.

Taken together, the indictment and the warning suggest that the Iranian government is making broader use of its offensive cyber-units, and learning from techniques it is picking up from Russia and elsewhere. The warning did not name which American hospitals or transportation systems were the focus of Iranian attacks.

“Our intelligence officials have continually warned that other countries would seek to follow Russia’s 2016 playbook,” Senator Mark Warner, the Virginia Democrat and chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in a statement after the indictment was announced. “Today’s charges and sanctions against several Iranians believed to be behind a cyber campaign to intimidate and influence American voters in the 2020 election are further evidence that attempts to interfere in our elections will continue, and we must all be on guard against them.”

The indictment Thursday did not directly state that the two men were working for the Iranian government. Instead, they were employed by a cybersecurity firm that claims to do defensive work for the Iranian government. But U.S. officials have long contended that several such companies focus on offensive cyber activities — from theft of data to sabotaging of networks, often directed at the U.S.

In the election case, previously declassified intelligence reports have linked the efforts to Tehran’s government ministries, and suggested that Iran was attempting to use variations of the playbook designed by Russia in its efforts to influence the 2016 election.

In 2016 and in 2020, intelligence officials concluded Russia was trying to influence the election to benefit Mr. Trump. And while Thursday’s indictment did not specify the goal of the Iranian hackers — beyond sowing divisions among Americans — intelligence officials [have repeatedly said](#) that Iranian influence efforts were aimed at hurting Mr. Trump’s re-election efforts.

“This indictment details how two Iran-based actors waged a targeted, coordinated campaign to erode confidence in the integrity of the U.S. electoral system and to sow discord among Americans,” Matthew G. Olsen, who recently took over as head of the National Security Division of the Justice Department, said. “The allegations illustrate how foreign disinformation campaigns operate and seek to influence the American public.”

Officials said that the Treasury Department would impose sanctions related to the charges, and rewards would likely be set up for information that would enable the U.S. to arrest the two indicted hackers. But the men are in Iran, and the best officials can hope for is to get them arrested and extradited if they travel outside the country.

In a speech earlier this week, Gen. Paul M. Nakasone, the head of U.S. Cyber Command and director of the National Security Agency, said one of the main lessons of the government’s 2020 election defense efforts was that multiple foreign governments had tried to influence the outcome.

Intelligence officials have said that Russia, Iran and China mounted the biggest efforts to influence American politics in 2020, although Cuba also pushed narratives to denigrate Mr. Trump, the March intelligence report found.

“What did we learn? That we had more adversaries. We had more committed adversaries,” General Nakasone said.

Other intelligence officials have noted that Russia appeared to hold back from the kind of tactics it used in 2016; instead, the SVR, one of Russia’s premier intelligence agencies, focused on the SolarWinds infiltration, altering a type of software used by thousands of companies and government agencies. That

	gave them access to a far larger group of targets — a technique that China and other countries are also using.
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HEADLINE	11/18 Conti gang \$25.5M since July 2021
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/conti-gang-has-made-at-least-25-5-million-since-july-2021/
GIST	<p>The operators of the Conti ransomware have earned at least \$25.5 million from attacks and subsequent ransoms carried out since July 2021, Swiss security firm Prodaft said in a report today.</p> <p>The company said it worked with blockchain analysis firm Elliptic to track more than 500 bitcoin the Conti gang had collected over the past five months in 113 cryptocurrency addresses.</p> <p>Prodaft and Elliptic said they identified several transactions that split \$6.2 million of the Conti profits and sent them to what they called a “consolidation wallet.”</p> <p>“In August 2021, 0.07 bitcoin was sent from this cluster to a prominent exchange known to be used by ransomware groups. Aside from this, Conti have not attempted to cash out or exchange any of the bitcoin they have received into this cluster. Blockchain activity indicates that the remaining 123.06 bitcoin is currently held in an unhosted wallet.”</p> <p>In addition, researchers said they also tracked ransom payments as the Conti gang distributed the profits to its partners. Known as “affiliates,” these are criminal groups who perform intrusions into companies, install the Conti ransomware, and then get a cut from the ransom payment at the end.</p> <p>“One cluster was identified which has received payments from both Conti and DarkSide, which may indicate that an individual has worked as an affiliate for both of these groups,” the researchers said, confirming other past reports highlighting that some affiliates jump ship from one ransomware program to another when drawn with larger cuts or better encryption tools.</p> <p>The discovery of the consolidation wallet is good news, as this could be targeted in a future law enforcement action and have authorities seize a large chunk of a gang’s profits, as the DOJ has done this month with one of REvil’s affiliates.</p> <p>However, Prodaft points out that while the Conti gang itself runs a consolidation wallet, its affiliates do not appear to do so, and they usually launder their profits through shady exchanges, coin swaps, privacy-enhancing wallets like Wasabi, and via Russian-language darknet market Hydra.</p> <p>First-ever Conti estimates</p> <p>But the estimated \$25.5 million earnings are just that, an estimation, and the Conti gang is believed to have earned much more over this period, and its history, dating back to August 2020.</p> <p>However, the figure is also the first and only estimation of Conti’s profits made until today.</p> <p>Research into tracking ransom payments and the threat actor’s wallets has been done before for other gangs, and this type of research has often helped inform authorities about today’s most dangerous groups, which has often led to law enforcement crackdowns.</p> <p>Past research and profit estimations for other ransomware gangs include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Darkside – \$90 million between October 2020 and May 2021. • Maze/Egregor – \$75 million • Ryuk – \$150 million (Conti is considered a rebrand/continuation of the Ryuk operation) • REvil – \$123 million in 2020 • Netwalker – \$25 million between March and July 2020 <p>After the shutdowns of ransomware operations like Avaddon, REvil, Darkside, and BlackMatter, the Conti gang, along with the LockBit group, have become the most active ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS)</p>

	platforms today, which explains the attention the group is now getting from both security firms and US cybersecurity agencies—with CISA issuing a security alert about the group’s heightened activity in September.
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	11/19 UK: taxi bomb risked significant harm
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/uk-police-taxi-bomb-caused-significant-harm-81272977
GIST	<p>LONDON -- The homemade bomb that killed a man in a taxi in Liverpool contained ball bearings and would have caused “significant injury or death” if it had exploded in different circumstances, British police said Friday.</p> <p>The suspected bomb-maker, Emad Al Swealmeen, 32, died when a blast ripped through the cab in which he was a passenger as it pulled up outside Liverpool Women’s Hospital on Sunday morning. The taxi driver was injured.</p> <p>Russ Jackson, head of counterterrorism policing in northwest England, said Friday that the device “was made using homemade explosive and had ball bearings attached to it which would have acted as shrapnel.”</p> <p>“Had it detonated in different circumstances we believe it would have caused significant injury or death,” he said.</p> <p>Jackson said police were investigating whether the bomb had exploded unintentionally as the vehicle moved or when it stopped.</p> <p>Police said Al Swealmeen, who was originally from Iraq, had spent at least six months buying components for a bomb and appears to have acted alone.</p> <p>Al Swealmeen had applied for asylum in Britain in 2014, but was rejected, authorities said. Clergy at two Liverpool churches said Al Swealmeen had converted from Islam to Christianity.</p> <p>Police have also confirmed that Al Swealmeen was treated in the past for mental illness.</p> <p>Jackson said detectives had spoken to a brother of the suspected bomber, who had given police “an understanding of Al Swealmeen’s life and his recent state of mind, which is an important line of investigation.”</p> <p>Britain’s official threat level was raised from substantial to severe — meaning an attack is highly likely — following the blast, which happened on Remembrance Sunday, when services are held in memory of those who have died in wars.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Teenagers as terror threat to New Zealand?
SOURCE	https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2021/11/national-security-advisors-concerned-teenagers-could-present-a-terrorism-threat-to-new-zealand.html
GIST	<p>The Government's national security advisors warn more young people under the age of 18 are being lured into violent extremist ideologies.</p> <p>“The reality is in this day in age, this stuff is a real risk,” says Intelligence Minister Andrew Little.</p> <p>Ben Elley works for Independent Research Solutions and is completing his PhD on the alt-right and online radicalisation.</p>

“It's something that has to come to people at a very specific point in their life, they have to be feeling desperate, they have to be poorly informed, they have to be unhappy”.

In documents obtained by Newshub our security agencies say it's due to;

"Readily accessible extremist material and recruitment propaganda online, gaming culture, access to modern technology, and increased youth engagement with prominent polarising issues, such as climate change.

"We judge youth may seek engagement with violent extremist ideologies to attain a sense of belonging. “For those who don't have great skills in terms of reality testing, who are not aware of what these things really mean, it's a trap you can certainly fall into,” Elley says.

The advisors say ‘we note these individuals could present a credible terrorism threat to New Zealand, despite their age’.

“If you look at the personality profile of some of these people, often loners, often socially disconnected in terms of their physical connection with other people,” Little says.

The Department of Internal Affairs' Digital Safety team monitors violent extremism online. It found 315 extremist accounts, channels or pages onshore last year that had posted more than 600-thousand times. 7-thousand of those posts were classified as either aggressive or a call to action.

In order to prevent this, experts believe education is key.

“I think the Government’s role will be through schools, education campaigns and things like that. Just to make sure young people are prepared and know what to think and what to do when they encounter things like this,” says Elley.

“We've just got to make sure they know there's a big wide world out there, and what is presented on social media is actually not real, and often it's very unreal,” Little says.

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HEADLINE	11/19 Britain to ban Hamas as terror organization
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britain-set-proscribe-hamas-terrorist-organisation-uk-media-reports-2021-11-19/
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM, Nov 19 (Reuters) - Britain will proscribe Palestinian militant group Hamas as a terrorist organisation, its interior ministry said on Friday, a move that would bring its position on Gaza's rulers in line with the United States and EU.</p> <p>The organisation would be banned under the Terrorism Act and that anyone expressing support for Hamas, flying its flag or arranging meetings for the organisation would be in breach of the law, according to a report in the Guardian newspaper which the ministry said was accurate.</p> <p>The Times newspaper said interior minister Priti Patel would announce the move in Washington and present it to parliament next week.</p> <p>Until now, Britain has banned only Hamas's military wing — the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.</p> <p>Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett welcomed reports of the decision. In a Twitter post he said "Hamas is a terrorist organization, simply put. The 'political arm' enables its military activity. The same terrorists - only in suits."</p> <p>A Hamas official in Gaza said it would wait until an official announcement from Britain before issuing a response.</p>

Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in 1987, it is opposed to the existence of Israel, and opposes peace talks, instead advocating "armed resistance" against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

The most recent outbreak of violence was an 11-day conflict in May, in which Palestinian officials say 250 people were killed by Israeli air strikes on Gaza, including 66 children. Israeli officials say 13 people, including two children, were killed in Israel by militant rockets.

'STRENGTHENING TIES'

Interior minister Patel was forced to resign as Britain's international development secretary in 2017 after she failed to disclose meetings with senior Israeli officials during a private holiday to the country.

She met with then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Bennett's predecessor, and then-opposition leader Yair Lapid.

Lapid, now Israel's foreign minister, hailed the expected decision on Hamas as "part of strengthening ties with Britain."

Israel and the United States regard all of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. It is on the U.S. list of designated foreign terrorist organisations. The European Union also deems it a terrorist movement.

Based in Gaza, Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, defeating its nationalist rival Fatah. It seized military control of Gaza the following year.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Pakistan frees hardline Islamist in deal
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/pakistan-frees-hardline-islamist-saad-hussain-rizvi-under-deal-end-n1284187
GIST	<p>LAHORE, Pakistan — Pakistan freed a hardline Islamist leader on Thursday, a week after removing his name from a terrorism watch list under a deal to end weeks of deadly protests by his followers, the government and his lawyer said.</p> <p>Saad Hussain Rizvi, the chief of a Sunni militant group — Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) — was released from a jail in Lahore city, a government spokesman, Hasaan Khawar, told Reuters. His lawyer Muhammad Rizwan confirmed the release.</p> <p>"By the grace of God, he is a free man now," he said.</p> <p>The release came two weeks after the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan agreed to free over 2,000 detained members of the TLP movement, lifted a ban on the group and agreed to let it contest elections.</p> <p>In return, the TLP would shun the politics of violence and withdraw a demand to have France's ambassador expelled over the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad by a French magazine, negotiators have said.</p> <p>The TLP took to the streets in mid-October, kicking off weeks of protests and clashes that killed at least seven police officers, injured scores on both sides and blocked the country's busiest highway.</p> <p>Khan's government had designated the TLP a terrorist group and arrested Rizvi amid similar violent protests earlier this year.</p>

	<p>The TLP, which can mobilize thousands of supporters, was born in 2015 out of a protest campaign to seek the release of a police guard who assassinated a provincial governor in 2011 over his calls to reform blasphemy legislation.</p> <p>It entered politics in 2017 and surprised the political elite by securing more than 2 million votes in the 2018 election.</p> <p>The next national election is scheduled for 2023, and analysts expect political groups to start gearing up from early next year.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Extremists exploit online recruit youngsters
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/19/extremists-using-online-gaming-and-covid-conspiracies-to-recruit-youngsters
GIST	<p>Rightwing extremists are using Covid controversies and online gaming as a way of recruiting young people, as data shows half of the most serious cases of suspected radicalisation reported by schools and colleges now involve far-right activity.</p> <p>Figures published by the Home Office show twice as many young people in education in England and Wales last year were thought to be at risk of radicalisation by the extreme right-wing, compared with those at risk from Islamic extremists.</p> <p>The new figures from the government's Prevent anti-extremism programme, covering 2020-21, show that 310 people were referred to Prevent by schools, colleges and universities because of far-right links. Just 157 were referred because of vulnerability to Islamic extremism.</p> <p>But while fewer than one in five cases of suspected Islamic extremism were escalated by the authorities, nearly one in three cases involving far-right extremism were passed on to the government's Channel scheme, which aims to safeguard individuals thought most likely to be radicalised and drawn into terrorist activity.</p> <p>Sean Arbuthnot, a Prevent coordinator for Leicestershire, said that while far-right extremism has been on the rise for several years, online apps and platforms were increasingly cropping up in referrals, including gaming platforms and chat apps such as Discord, as rightwing groups sought to reach young people.</p> <p>While eight violent and racist rightwing groups have been proscribed by the government, Arbuthnot said he was concerned by far-right groups that have yet to be banned attaching themselves to existing controversies.</p> <p>"[Some] during the pandemic conducted leafleting campaigns, where they would promote the narrative that Covid is a hoax, that hospital wards are empty, and that you shouldn't get the vaccine. Then they load their leaflets with pseudo-scientific evidence. But at the same time they drop leaflets purporting that white people are going to be a minority in Britain, which plays into peoples fears," Arbuthnot said.</p> <p>"If you engage with them on a YouTube platform, and scroll through the comments section, you may then find links to more encrypted chatrooms or extreme right-wing codes or signs and symbols that you may be tempted to research.</p> <p>"That's one of the troubling ways right-wing extremists can play on the fears that have resulted from Covid-19 and conspiracies, to groom, essentially, vulnerable young people in the online space."</p> <p>One school leader in the east Midlands – who asked not to be named – said that the lockdowns and extended time spent out of school meant there had been a "shock" in hearing pupils return to school with dangerous and extreme attitudes.</p>

“A few came back, and it was like they were speaking a different language that I imagine they can only have picked up online,” she said.

Research by UCL’s Institute of Education earlier this year found teachers are seeing a rise in extremist views and conspiracy theories among pupils, but feel they lack the training or resources to tackle it.

Becky Taylor of the UCL Institute of Education, said: “The teachers we spoke to told us it was rare for young people to join extremist groups, but it was very common for young people to express extreme views in schools.”

Of the teachers surveyed, 95% had heard pupils express racist views, 90% had encountered homophobia or conspiracy theories and nearly three-quarters had encountered extremist views on women or Islamophobic views.

“For teachers in the classroom, because young people can get quite deep into these views and can be very well versed in all the arguments, if you are not expert in these things yourself, it can be very difficult to challenge them,” Taylor said.

Owen Jones, director of training and education for Hope Not Hate, said the charity was seeing younger students becoming involved in far-right extremism, including boys as young as 13, often using the Telegram messaging app.

Schools are “poorly equipped” to tackle the problem, Jones said, because the language of the new extreme right or alt-right has changed so much, that many teachers may not have a clue what students were talking about.

But Arbuthnot said schools and colleges in Leicester had developed bespoke projects using local organisations and charities, adapting their techniques as they became aware of new dangers.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said the Prevent figures emphasised the need for improved support for schools in tackling those issues, as well as more action by platforms to block and remove harmful content and robust online regulation.

While overall referrals from the education sector under Prevent have fallen – from close to 2,000 to 1,221 in 2020-21 – the extended closure of schools, colleges and universities after March last year is responsible. The largest category of referrals was for individuals with unstable or unclear ideologies, but fewer than one in 10 of those referrals became Channel cases.

A [Home Office](#) spokesperson said: “It is vitally important that if anyone has a concern about someone they think may be being radicalised, that they act early and seek help.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Extremist crimes among veterans on rise
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/extremist-crimes-among-veterans-rise-185936098.html
GIST	<p>The number of veterans participating in extremism more than tripled over the past 10 years, according to a report from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, totaling nearly 24 new subjects each year.</p> <p>The finding comes from a dive into the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States project, with details about numerous cases of extremist activity, the findings of which were released in July.</p> <p>“It is important to note that the recent increase in subjects with military backgrounds in PIRUS is largely due to three years in the data—2017, 2020, and 2021,” according to the report. “Each of these years were marked by issues that mobilized comparatively large numbers of U.S. extremists.”</p>

Notably, those years saw the inauguration of President Donald Trump and the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia; the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide racial justice protests and the election of President Joe Biden; and the contentious certification of that election by Congress in January of this year.

Looking through cases from 1990 to 2021, researchers pulled 424 individuals — 415 men and nine women — with military backgrounds, including 99 who are facing charges for involvement in the Capitol Hill riot on Jan. 6.

While the 8% of troops/veterans in the PIRUS data is on par with the proportion of U.S. residents who are either currently serving or have previously served, the report found that women with military experience were significantly less likely to participate in extremism compared to their male peers.

Though women make up 9% of U.S. adults with military experience, they are fewer than 2% of those who have been involved in known extremism crimes.

Of the hundreds who had military backgrounds, according to the report, 355 — just under 84% — didn't commit any crimes until after they had been separated. Of those 23, or just over 5%, committed a crime after washing out of basic training.

The vast majority of those who have committed crimes were either current or former members of the active duty Army, followed by the active duty Marine Corps — more than 70% combined. With reserve duty in either of those branches, the percentage jumps to 79.

The types of crimes they were arrested for varies, but just under 60% of them were for violent plots, and only 40% percent of those were carried out.

Another 10% were weapons charges, 6.5% for providing material support to extremism, followed by a few instances of harassment, financial crime, spontaneous violence and property destruction.

And just over 46% of those crimes committed by veterans were targeting the U.S. government, the military or law enforcement.

“Nearly half of the subjects in PIRUS with military backgrounds adhered to anti-government views or were members of organized militias,” according to the report.

Another 34% were in white supremacist groups, while 11% were identified as jihadists. Smaller percentages, between 5 and 1, included anti-abortion activists, cult/conspiracy theory believers, male supremacists, Black separatist groups or anarchist/anti-capitalist activists.

That included 35 members of the Sovereign Citizen movement, 19 Oath Keepers and 15 members of the Boogaloo movement. Then there were 18 Proud Boys, 16 Ku Klux Klan members and 9 who were members of the National Alliance.

In total, about 68% were aligned with a particular group, but the remainder weren't.

For the Jan. 6 attack specifically, 99 military affiliations have been identified so far, 92 of whom were no longer service members at the time.

Of those, nearly 59% did not belong to any extremist groups, but those who were included 16 Proud Boys, 10 Oath Keepers and 12 QAnon conspiracy theorists.

In response to the disproportionate number of Jan. 6 arrests of troops and veterans, about one in five, the Pentagon earlier this year called for an anti-extremism standdown, then followed it up with a working group.

	<p>That group is tasked with improving recruiting screening and education for separating troops, to both prevent extremists from joining up and to prevent veterans from radicalization. They are also set to publish a new Defense Department definition of extremism, which will expand the current regulation, which mostly targets fundraising, organizing and other activity as incompatible with military service.</p> <p>The initial report was due to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in mid-July. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby has said it is currently in final review stages.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Afghans seek US entry; few get approved
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/thousands-of-afghans-seek-temporary-us-entry-few-approved/
GIST	<p>LOWELL, Mass. (AP) — More than 28,000 Afghans have applied for temporary admission into the U.S. for humanitarian reasons since shortly before the Taliban recaptured Afghanistan and sparked a chaotic U.S. withdrawal, but only about 100 of them have been approved, according to federal officials.</p> <p>U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has struggled to keep up with the surge in applicants to a little-used program known as humanitarian parole but promises it's ramping up staff to address the growing backlog.</p> <p>Afghan families in the U.S. and the immigrant groups supporting them say the slow pace of approvals threatens the safety of their loved ones, who face an uncertain future under the hard-line Islamic government because of their ties to the West.</p> <p>"We're worried for their lives," says Safi, a Massachusetts resident whose family is sponsoring 21 relatives seeking humanitarian parole. "Sometimes, I think there will be a day when I wake up and receive a call saying that they're no more."</p> <p>The 38-year-old U.S. permanent resident, who asked that her last name not be used for fear of retribution against her relatives, is hoping to bring over her sister, her uncle and their families. She says the families have been in hiding and their house was destroyed in a recent bombing because her uncle had been a prominent local official before the Taliban took over.</p> <p>The slow pace of approvals is frustrating because families have already paid hundreds if not thousands of dollars in processing fees, says Chiara St. Pierre, an attorney at the International Institute of New England in Lowell, Massachusetts, a refugee resettlement agency assisting Safi's family.</p> <p>Each parole application comes with a \$575 filing charge, meaning USCIS, which is primarily fee-funded, is sitting on some \$11.5 million from Afghans in the last few months alone, she and other advocates complain.</p> <p>"People are desperate to get their families out," said St. Pierre, whose nonprofit has filed more than 50 parole applications for Afghan nationals. "Do we not owe a duty to the people left behind, especially when they are following our immigration laws and using the options they have?"</p> <p>Victoria Palmer, a USCIS spokesperson, said the agency has trained 44 additional staff to help address the application surge. As of mid-October, the agency had only six staffers detailed to the program.</p> <p>Of the more than 100 approved as of July 1, some are still in Afghanistan and some have made it to third countries, she said, declining to provide details. The program typically receives fewer than 2,000 requests annually from all nationalities, of which USCIS approves an average of about 500, according to Palmer.</p> <p>Part of the challenge is that humanitarian parole requires an in-person interview, meaning those in Afghanistan need to travel to another country with an operating U.S. embassy or consulate after they've</p>

cleared the initial screening. U.S. officials warn it could then take months longer, and there's no guarantee parole will be granted, even after the interview.

Humanitarian parole doesn't provide a path to lawful permanent residence or confer U.S. immigration status. It's meant for foreigners who are unable to go through the asylum or other traditional visa processes, but who need to leave their country urgently.

The backlog of parole requests comes on top of the more than 73,000 Afghan refugees already evacuated from the country as part of Operations Allies Welcome, which was focused on Afghans who worked for the U.S. government as interpreters and in other jobs.

Most have arrived in the country and have been staying on military bases awaiting resettlement in communities across the country, though about 2,000 still remain overseas awaiting clearance to enter the U.S., according to Palmer.

But advocates question some of USCIS's recent decisions for Afghan humanitarian parole, such as prioritizing applications from those already living in other countries. They say that approach is at odds with the program's purpose of helping those most at risk.

The Biden administration should instead focus on applications from women and girls, LGBTQ people and religious minorities still in the country, said Sunil Varghese, of the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project.

It could also dispense with some of the financial documentation required for applicants and their sponsors, since Congress has passed legislation making Afghan evacuees eligible for refugee benefits, said Lindsay Gray, CEO of Vecina, an Austin, Texas-based group that trains attorneys and volunteers on immigration matters.

Palmer didn't directly address the critiques but said the agency, in each case, determines if there's a "distinct, well-documented reason" to approve humanitarian parole and whether other protections are available. USCIS also considers whether the person already has U.S. ties, such as a family member with legal status or prior work for the U.S. government, among other factors.

In the meantime, Afghans in the U.S. have little choice but to wait and fret.

Bahara, another Afghan living in Massachusetts who asked her last name be withheld over concerns for her family, says she's been wracked with guilt for her decision to leave her country to attend a local university.

The 29-year-old boarded a plane on Aug. 15 just hours before the Taliban swept into the capital of Kabul, leading to one of the largest mass evacuations in U.S. history.

"It was my dream, but it changed completely," said Bahara, referring to enrolling in a U.S. master's degree program. "I couldn't stop thinking about my family. I couldn't sleep the first few weeks. All I did was cry, but it didn't help."

Bahara said her family is worried because Taliban officials have been paying unannounced visits to people like her father who worked with the U.S. government after the militant group was originally ousted from power by the U.S. following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

An American family is now sponsoring her family for humanitarian parole, giving Bahara hope even as she grieves over her country's current situation.

"I cannot believe how everything just collapsed," said Bahara, who founded a children's literacy program in Afghanistan. "All the achievements and hard work just added up to zero, and now people are suffering."

	<p>Baktash Sharifi Baki, a green-card holder who has been living in the U.S. since 2014, was compelled to take more drastic measures as Afghanistan quickly unraveled this summer.</p> <p>The Philadelphia resident, who served as an interpreter for the U.S. government, traveled back in August in the hopes of shepherding his wife, daughter, mother and godson to safety.</p> <p>But the family wasn't able to board any of the final commercial flights out of Kabul. Baki has appealed to the U.S. government to allow them to board one of the charter flights that have recently resumed.</p> <p>Meanwhile, a friend in Louisiana has offered to serve as the family's sponsor for a humanitarian parole application, even covering the costly fees himself.</p> <p>Baki and his family are staying for now with relatives in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. But he worries his modest cash savings is dwindling just as the region's harsh winter sets in and Afghanistan's economic crisis is deepening.</p> <p>"We are really facing a bad situation here," Baki said. "We need to get out."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Uganda: shootout w/extremists; 5 killed
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/uganda-police-kill-five-men-after-suicide-bombings-including-muslim-cleric
GIST	<p>Ugandan authorities have killed at least five people, including a Muslim cleric, accused of having ties to the extremist group responsible for Tuesday's suicide bombings in the capital.</p> <p>Four men were killed in a shootout in a frontier town near the western border with Congo as they tried to cross back into Uganda, police said on Thursday. A fifth man, a cleric named Muhammad Kirevu, was killed in "a violent confrontation" when security forces raided his home outside Kampala, police spokesperson Fred Enanga said.</p> <p>A second cleric, Suleiman Nsubuga, is the subject of a manhunt, he said, accusing the two clerics of radicalising young Muslim men and encouraging them to join underground cells to carry out violent attacks.</p> <p>The police raids come after the explosions on Tuesday in which at least four civilians were killed when suicide bombers detonated their explosives at two locations in Kampala. One attack happened near the parliamentary building and the second near a busy police station. The attacks sparked chaos and confusion in the city as well as outpourings of concern from the international community.</p> <p>A total of 21 suspects with alleged links to the perpetrators are in custody, Enanga said.</p> <p>Islamic State claimed responsibility for Tuesday's explosions, saying they were carried out by Ugandans. Authorities blamed the attacks on the Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF, an extremist group that has been allied with IS since 2019.</p> <p>President Yoweri Museveni identified the alleged suicide bombers in a statement in which he warned that security forces were "coming for" alleged members of the ADF.</p> <p>While Ugandan authorities are under pressure to show they are in control of the situation, the killings of suspects raise fears of a crackdown in which innocent people will become victims.</p> <p>Despite the horror of the bomb attacks, "it remains critical to ensure no terrorist attack translates into a blank check to violate human rights under a pretext of fighting terror", said Maria Burnett, a rights lawyer with the Center for Strategic & International Studies.</p>

“Across east [Africa](#), terrorism has been a pretext at times to ensnare political opponents, civic actors, and even refugees seeking protection,” she said. “Such actions risk radicalising people in support of non-state actors and hands those actors an easy propaganda tool.”

Human Rights Watch has previously documented cases in which Ugandan security have allegedly tortured ADF suspects and held them without trial for long periods.

The ADF has for years been opposed to the long rule of Museveni, a US security ally who was the first African leader to deploy peacekeepers in Somalia to protect the federal government from the extremist group al-Shabaab.

In retaliation over Uganda’s deployment of troops to Somalia, that group carried out attacks [in 2010 that killed at least 70 people](#) who had assembled in public places in Kampala to watch the football World Cup final.

But the ADF, with its local roots, has become a more pressing challenge to Museveni, 77, who has ruled Uganda for 35 years and was reelected to a five-year term in January.

The group was established in the early 1990s by some Ugandan Muslims, who said they had been sidelined by Museveni’s policies. At the time, the rebel group staged deadly attacks in Ugandan villages as well as in the capital, including a 1998 attack in which 80 students were massacred in a town near the Congo border.

A Ugandan military assault later forced the rebels into eastern Congo, where many rebel groups are able to roam free because the central government has limited control there.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Iraq cleric: militias purge corrupt members
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-cleric-sadr-urges-militias-purge-undisciplined-members-2021-11-18/
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD, Nov 18 (Reuters) - Powerful Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr urged the country's paramilitaries on Thursday to purge what he called undisciplined members and for non-state armed groups to hand over their weapons.</p> <p>Sadr's remarks come after Iran-backed Shi'ite Muslim militia were accused of an attempt to kill outgoing Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi by armed drone on Nov. 7.</p> <p>The militias are disputing the result of an October general election that handed them a crushing defeat and have also staged sit-ins in Baghdad which turned violent this month.</p> <p>Sadr, who commands his own militia but opposes all foreign influence in Iraq, including that of Iran, is seen as the main Shi'ite rival of the paramilitaries Tehran has backed.</p> <p>"You must step back in order to regain the trust of the people," Sadr said in a statement delivered to news cameras from his base in the southern holy city of Najaf.</p> <p>"What you're doing right now will tarnish your history and increase your alienation from the people."</p> <p>Sadr did not refer explicitly to recent events, but addressed his message to what he called the losing parties in Iraq's election.</p> <p>He called on Iraq's state paramilitary grouping the Popular Mobilisation Forces, which is dominated by the Iran-aligned factions, to purge "undisciplined elements" and for non-state armed groups to dissolve themselves and lay down their weapons.</p>

	<p>Sadr will likely have a big say in the formation of the next Iraqi government, a prospect that worries his main rivals the Iran-backed groups, according to Iraqi officials and independent analysts.</p> <p>"If you want to participate in forming the next government, you must hold those corrupt among you to account," he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 UK warns Christmas crowds: remain alert
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2021/11/18/uk-christmas-crowds-warned-of-increased-terror-threat-from-emboldened-extremists/
GIST	<p>Patrols by armed police will be increased and security plans for major events reviewed after Britain's terrorist threat level was raised following the Liverpool attack.</p> <p>Assistant Commissioner Matt Jukes, the head of UK counterterrorism policing, said the public will see an increased police presence in key locations and officers will boost their work online.</p> <p>The British public were also asked to remain alert during the Christmas period and report anything suspicious to the police.</p> <p>Speaking in Leicester Square in London's West End on Wednesday, Mr Jukes told the PA news agency: "All across the country you will have seen plans for major events reviewed, you will see an increased armed policing presence in some key locations.</p> <p>"In places like London where we have dedicated counterterror patrols, they will be very focused.</p> <p>"You will see some more visible policing but, of course, also we will be very active in other places. Online, in our communities talking to people about their concerns."</p> <p>The terrorist threat was raised from substantial to severe, meaning an attack is "highly likely" rather than "likely", after the blast outside Liverpool Women's Hospital on Remembrance Sunday.</p> <p>Emad Al Swealmeen spent months planning his bomb attack and had been buying components "at least since April", investigators said.</p> <p>Mr Jukes said attacks that take months of planning provide opportunities for the public to spot suspicious behaviour.</p> <p>"In this case, it's too early to say what the behaviour was and how that might have been spotted by others, or indeed what others saw," he said.</p> <p>"But what we do know from other cases is that often attacks are planned over a series of months and there are opportunities for people to see changes in behaviour, to see unusual things happening.</p> <p>"Unusual deliveries to an address or unusual purchases, things which seem out of place.</p> <p>"Without commenting on the individual case, there are so many opportunities for members of the public – neighbours, friends and family – to play their part in keeping our communities safe," he said.</p> <p>"There are signals in the way people bring together improvised explosives that are important for the public to recognise – making strange purchases.</p> <p>"If you're a retailer, for example, if someone's buying something that just doesn't feel right for them, then it's really important that you make that call to us on the antiterrorist hotline."</p> <p>How to help unmask a lone-wolf terrorist</p>

	<p>The senior officer, who has worked in counterterrorism for two decades, said that even with lone-wolf terrorists there are still chances for someone to unmask them.</p> <p>“The lone actor is still a real concern for us. The individual who spends time online. But the reality is they’re never really completely alone – inspired by something they see online, instructed by something they’ve seen online, and also often in contact with friends and family.</p> <p>“So it’s so important that friends, family, neighbours spot the changes in behaviour. Very often when we look back on these events there may have been a signal that’s been an opportunity.”</p> <p>He said police and the security services also need the help of the public, particularly parents, in spotting when someone has accessed terrorist or extremist material online.</p> <p>“We’re very concerned about the availability of information that’s useful for terrorists online and that’s why every year we’re prosecuting people for sharing that information,” he said.</p> <p>“We really do, again, need the help of the public who come across that. Sadly, we need the help of parents as well. We know that many, many more young people are finding or coming across some of that information so it’s an important conversation to have.”</p> <p>UK counterterrorism police, who along with the security services are working on about 800 live investigations, want the public to remain vigilant about the risk of terrorism in crowded places in the run-up to Christmas.</p> <p>“This is certainly a very concerning period that has led to the increase in the threat level. What we do know is that sometimes a terrorist attack in the UK or around the world can galvanise or encourage somebody else,” Mr Jukes said.</p> <p>“That’s the reason why the threat level has been increased.</p> <p>“Clearly it’s concerning but it’s important for people not to feel powerless in the middle of that and to recognise we’ve all got incredible potential to make a contribution to make that call.</p> <p>“If you feel something isn’t right, make that call to the antiterrorist hotline, go online to one of the reporting mechanisms, because we can all make a difference and defeat terrorism.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/17 UN: ISIS is present in all Afghan provinces
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/un-envoy-says-islamic-state-now-appears-present-all-afghan-provinces-2021-11-17/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON, Nov 17 (Reuters) - The U.N. envoy to Afghanistan on Wednesday delivered a bleak assessment of the situation following the Taliban takeover, saying that an affiliate of the Islamic State group has grown and now appears present in nearly all 34 provinces.</p> <p>U.N. Special Representative Deborah Lyons told the U.N. Security Council that the Taliban's response to Islamic State-Khorasan Province's (ISKP) expansion "appears to rely heavily on extrajudicial detentions and killings" of suspected ISKP fighters.</p> <p>"This is an area deserving more attention from the international community," she said.</p> <p>Her comments came hours after the group -- an ideological foe of the Taliban -- claimed responsibility for two blasts that killed at least one person and wounded six others in a heavily Shiite Muslim neighborhood of Kabul. read more</p> <p>The Taliban, she said, has been unable to stem ISKP's growth.</p>

	<p>"Once limited to a few provinces and the capital, ISKP now seems to be present in nearly all provinces, and increasingly active," Lyons said, adding that the number of the group's attacks have increased from 60 strikes in 2020 to 334 this year.</p> <p>While the Taliban is making "genuine efforts to present itself as a government" since seizing Kabul in August after a 20-year war with the United States, they continue excluding representatives of other sectors of society and curtailing the rights of women and girls.</p> <p>The U.N. mission regularly receives credible reports of house searches and the "extrajudicial killings" of former security personnel and officials, she said.</p> <p>Lyons warned anew of a humanitarian catastrophe as winter looms due to a failing economy and drought.</p> <p>She implored the international community to find ways to fund the salaries of healthcare workers, teachers and humanitarian workers, saying humanitarian aid is insufficient.</p> <p>The economic collapse will fuel illicit drug, arms and human trafficking and unregulated money exchanges that "can only help facilitate terrorism," Lyons said.</p> <p>"These pathologies will first affect Afghanistan," she said. "Then they will infect the region."</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	11/18 Dozens saved from flooding: man w/tractor
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/local-man-saves-dozens-from-flooding-with-tractor
GIST	<p>SUMAS, Wash. - Sumas, in Whatcom County, is one of the hardest-hit areas in the region from this week's historic rains and flooding.</p> <p>Water damaged an estimated 75% of homes in the city, leaving many stranded and in need of help.</p> <p>FOX 13 News spoke to one local man who answered the call.</p> <p>"I'm just a tractor salesman," said Mike Scholten.</p> <p>Scholten says one of his coworkers was stranded in Sumas on Monday. So, he and several other employees headed to the city in tractors.</p> <p>Scholten says when he got to Sumas, he realized how large the need actually was.</p> <p>"That town is a mess. People needed help; they needed out," he said</p> <p>Working alongside the Sumas Police Department, Scholten and his team helped save dozens of people from the flooding.</p> <p>On the way home, they also saved a family trapped in their car, surrounded by the cold and fast-moving waters.</p> <p>"It shocked me a little bit. I had not seen people in cars all day. I saw a lot of cars stranded, but never saw people," he said.</p> <p>Scholten is not a first responder--he just had the means to help and did so.</p>

	<p>He says he hopes others will help this holiday season by supporting community members who lost everything in the flood.</p> <p>The Whatcom County Community Foundation and the Sumas Advent Christian Church are collecting donations for people impacted by this storm.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 FDA: 55yrs to process FOIA vaccine data
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/wait-what-fda-wants-55-years-process-foia-request-over-vaccine-data-2021-11-18/
GIST	<p>(Reuters) - Freedom of Information Act requests are rarely speedy, but when a group of scientists asked the federal government to share the data it relied upon in licensing Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, the response went beyond typical bureaucratic foot-dragging.</p> <p>As in 55 years beyond.</p> <p>That's how long the Food & Drug Administration in court papers this week proposes it should be given to review and release the trove of vaccine-related documents responsive to the request. If a federal judge in Texas agrees, plaintiffs Public Health and Medical Professionals for Transparency can expect to see the full record in 2076.</p> <p>The 1967 FOIA law requires federal agencies to respond to information requests within 20 business days. However, the time it takes to actually get the documents "will vary depending on the complexity of the request and any backlog of requests already pending at the agency," according to the government's central FOIA website.</p> <p>Justice Department lawyers representing the FDA note in court papers that the plaintiffs are seeking a huge amount of vaccine-related material – about 329,000 pages.</p> <p>The plaintiffs, a group of more than 30 professors and scientists from universities including Yale, Harvard, UCLA and Brown, filed suit in September in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, seeking expedited access to the records. They say that releasing the information could help reassure vaccine skeptics that the shot is indeed "safe and effective and, thus, increase confidence in the Pfizer vaccine."</p> <p>But the FDA can't simply turn the documents over wholesale. The records must be reviewed to redact "confidential business and trade secret information of Pfizer or BioNTech and personal privacy information of patients who participated in clinical trials," wrote DOJ lawyers in a joint status report filed Monday.</p> <p>The FDA proposes releasing 500 pages per month on a rolling basis, noting that the branch that would handle the review has only 10 employees and is currently processing about 400 other FOIA requests.</p> <p>"By processing and making interim responses based on 500-page increments, FDA will be able to provide more pages to more requesters, thus avoiding a system where a few large requests monopolize finite processing resources and where fewer requesters' requests are being fulfilled," DOJ lawyers wrote, pointing to other court decisions where the 500-page-per-month schedule was upheld.</p> <p>Civil division trial lawyer Courtney Enlow referred my request for further comment to the DOJ public affairs office, which did not respond.</p> <p>Plaintiffs' lawyers argue that their request should be top priority, and that the FDA should release all the material no later than March 3, 2022.</p>

“This 108-day period is the same amount of time it took the FDA to review the responsive documents for the far more intricate task of licensing Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine,” wrote Aaron Siri of Siri & Glimstad in New York and John Howie of Howie Law in Dallas in court papers.

“The entire purpose of the FOIA is to assure government transparency,” they continued. “It is difficult to imagine a greater need for transparency than immediate disclosure of the documents relied upon by the FDA to license a product that is now being mandated to over 100 million Americans under penalty of losing their careers, their income, their military service status, and far worse.”

They also argue that [Title 21, subchapter F](#) of the FDA’s own regulations stipulates that the agency “is to make ‘immediately available’ all documents underlying licensure of a vaccine.”

Given the intense public interest in the vaccine, the plaintiffs' lawyers say that the FDA “should have been preparing to release (the data) simultaneously with the licensure. Instead, it has done the opposite.”

Siri declined comment.

To meet the plaintiffs’ proposed FOIA deadline, the FDA would have to process a daunting 80,000 pages a month. But the plaintiffs note that the FDA has 18,000 employees and a budget of \$6 billion and “has itself said that there is nothing more important than the licensure of this vaccine and being transparent about this vaccine.”

To be sure, most people -- including many who sanctimoniously proclaim “I do my own research” -- lack the expertise to evaluate the information.

But the plaintiffs, who also include overseas professors from the UK, Germany, Denmark, Australia and Canada, appear to be well-positioned to do so.

As Siri and Howe argue, “Reviewing this information will settle the ongoing public debate regarding the adequacy of the FDA’s review process.”

U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman has set a scheduling conference for December 14 in Fort Worth to consider the timeline for processing the documents.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Hawaii stream reeked beer: tested at 1.2%
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/11/18/waipio-hawaii-stream-alcohol-contamination/
GIST	<p>As a man hiked last month through lush terrain in Waipio, a town on Hawaii’s Oahu island, a pungent stench suddenly wafted past him. It smelled like alcohol, and it was coming from a nearby stream that was about 120 feet below a freeway.</p> <p>Concerned about the possible environmental implications, he contacted Carroll Cox, a local activist and advocate who runs the nonprofit EnviroWatch.</p> <p>“He described the smell as being horrific,” Cox said in an interview with The Washington Post.</p> <p>He and a few colleagues visited the scene soon after and noticed that a storm drain that poked out from underneath the freeway expelled the water down a cliff and into the stream. On the other side of the busy street was a warehouse for one of the state’s largest distributors of alcohol and liquor, he said.</p> <p>Cox reported the findings to government officials, who identified the source as Paradise Beverages, according to emails reviewed by The Post.</p> <p>The company is cooperating, Anthony Rowe, the distributor’s director of operations, told Hawaii News Now, which first reported the contamination last week.</p>

“It may be coming from us so that’s why we’re working with the proper authorities,” Rowe said.

Hawaii News Now tested the stream water’s alcohol level. It was 1.2 percent.

Cox said he was not surprised by the striking stench near the beverage company in Waipio, which is about 15 miles northwest of Honolulu. He said that kind of thing is “commonplace” in Hawaii — in the past, he’s found streams contaminated with paint and cement.

“[There’s a] lack of respect for the land and the water, even though we preach it. We don’t practice what we preach,” he said.

Hawaii is fragile ecologically, Cox said, adding that there are few remaining wetlands. Rising sea levels are causing saltwater to contaminate the island’s freshwater sources, according to the education and advocacy nonprofit Climate Reality Project. The dwindling supply will eventually impact accessibility to food and water across the state. And higher storm surges and rising sea levels are also accelerating erosion on the coasts, causing beaches to slowly disappear.

Cox noted in his complaint to the clean water branch of Hawaii’s Department of Health that the contamination was a violation of the Clean Water Act. The discharging of materials was damaging the water source and was “deleterious to the fish,” he said.

The hiker in Waipio first reached out to Cox on Oct. 27. Over a week later, Cox and a few colleagues drove northbound on the freeway near Paradise Beverages. They could smell the reek as they looked for the storm drain. They soon found ropes attached to a guard railing, which they used to rappel down.

“We found a completely dysfunctional storm water drain ... that dumps down the face of the canyon,” he said, adding that it was a six-foot round metal cylinder that extended underneath the freeway.

Cox filed his complaint on Nov. 8, and the health department notified him the next day that the Hawaii Department of Transportation was inspecting the drain pipe because it is the state agency’s property. Later that day, Cox learned that officials determined the dumping was coming from Paradise Beverages, which “was directed to stop the discharge,” the email reviewed by The Post said.

In a statement, a Transportation Department spokesperson said officials will continue to “work with [the Department of Health] and the city and county of Honolulu if further action is required,” adding that the department was “not aware of the situation” before it received Cox’s report.

Paradise Beverages and the Hawaii Department of Health did not immediately respond to The Post’s requests for comment early Thursday.

Cox said he is pleased with how quickly the departments responded to his complaint. But he added that he is still cautious knowing that politics tend to “creep into the matter of environmental issues.”

But, at the end of the day, “for me, this is just yet another day in paradise,” Cox said, “another horrendous, horrible day in paradise.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Venezuela experiments with capitalism
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/venezuela-turns-to-flashy-casinos-suvs-and-u-s-dollars-for-an-economic-boost-11637247602
GIST	CARACAS, Venezuela—A dozen casinos are opening here in a country where the Socialist government had banned gambling as a capitalist vice. And stores that were barren just a couple of years ago are now flush with imported goods, ranging from \$8,000 bicycles to frozen desserts from the Cheesecake Factory.

After seven years in which the economy contracted 80%—what economists call the biggest collapse in decades for a country not at war—Venezuela’s economy may have bottomed out. Gross domestic product will rise anywhere from 5% to 10% in 2021, the first year of growth since authoritarian leader Nicolás Maduro took office in 2013, business consultants and economists estimate.

The bounce is largely attributed to the scrapping of an ossified state-led economic model in exchange for an anything-goes version of capitalism that Mr. Maduro started to introduce, little by little, in 2019. Critics, among them opposition leaders and economists, say the influx of cash also stems from money laundering in a country where billions in oil proceeds were looted to create a 1990s-era Russian-style oligarchy now taking advantage of economic liberalization.

“Maduro is never going to be able to get the economy to recover,” said exiled opposition leader Julio Borges, calling [Mr. Maduro’s economic plans](#) tasteless efforts to mask Venezuela’s dire state.

But both detractors and government loyalists are benefiting from the [lifting of price controls](#) on basic goods, tariff-free imports and virtually no tax enforcement on businesses and individuals. Most important, the U.S. dollar, which was long scorned by the ruling regime as a tool of imperialist control, is now considered the de facto national currency.

Mr. Maduro’s foray toward market economics hangs over local and state elections that Venezuela is slated to hold Sunday. Political scientists say the ruling Socialist party is seeking to reinvent itself, offering economic liberties while maintaining its authoritarian grip on the country. At the same time, polls show Venezuelans are increasingly apathetic about politics, as they focus on how to survive in a cutthroat economy.

“Entrepreneurs here, entrepreneurs there,” Mr. Maduro said in a televised address, as he celebrated new food trucks selling lunches to workers in the capital. “We are on the path to economic growth. What lies ahead is going to be better for everyone. Count on me.”

Among the businesses finding new life are gambling casinos. Mr. Maduro’s predecessor, Hugo Chávez, had closed all of the country’s gambling houses, saying they were rife with vice and only enriched “the bourgeoisie.”

But under Mr. Maduro, a National Casinos Commission overseen by army generals has sold licenses—for \$350,000 each—to 30 new casinos around the country with names such as Baywatch, Bellagio and Hotel Dubai.

“This is a bet toward the future,” said Soraya Roye, a former gambling executive. A decade ago, she led protests against Mr. Chavez for closing casinos. Now, she trains workers for the revamped industry after having moved back to Venezuela from Mexico, where she had advised casino operators. “The government realized that they had to change and diversify the economy.”

From wealthy districts to the sprawling barrios of the capital city, the experiment with capitalism has breathed life into commerce that, by 2019, had nearly ground to a halt after restaurants, shops and stores closed. And Venezuelans battered by hyperinflation that at one point reached 2 million percent say they are feeling a rare sense of stability earning and spending in U.S. dollars.

“I can’t say things are going great,” said Brayan Riera, a 32-year-old resident of the east Caracas slum, Petare. “But I finally feel like the earth isn’t collapsing under my feet.”

Mr. Riera had fled Venezuela in 2019, like millions of his compatriots, but decided to return after struggling to make ends meet in Ecuador during the pandemic. Now he earns a few hundred dollars a month driving a cab, more than 20 times what the same job paid before he left the country.

Ruby Melendez, who sells socks and underwear imported from China at Petare's bustling central market, said her business will make its first profit in three years. "I was sure I was going to close down," the young merchant said on a recent day.

Nearby, currency traders, whose business had long been banned in the country, stood beside windows pockmarked with bullet holes, waving fists full of greenbacks to customers entering the market, where prices are marked in U.S. currency.

For much of Venezuela's 28 million people, it is still too early to celebrate. The benefits from the economic changes are largely limited to the capital and a couple of other big cities, said Henkel Garcia, director of the business consulting firm Econometrica. Citizens outside these few big cities remain condemned to scant power and water supply, gasoline shortages and the presence of armed criminal groups.

More than 90% of Venezuelans lived below the poverty line in 2020, according to Encovi, an annual study on living standards by researchers at three universities. That is well above the poverty rate in neighboring South American countries and the 30% rate that Venezuela registered a decade ago.

The government, reeling from diminished oil revenue, no longer subsidizes food, fuel or services. Private internet companies, importers and healthcare providers are slowly trying to fill the holes left by the collapse of the once sprawling public sector. It has sharply downsized in a country where the state's role in the economy had been omnipresent.

Shortages of food and medicines have been eased, namely because vendors, who used to be burdened by rigid state-set price caps, can now charge hefty prices for their goods and services. A medium-size pizza costs \$20. A short cab ride is \$10. A mechanic will charge \$50 just to look at your broken refrigerator. Such prices are a shock to most Venezuelans, who until recently had been earning the equivalent of a few U.S. dollars a month because of the plummeting value of the local currency, the bolivar.

Venezuela's central bank never imported U.S. currency and coins as counterparts did in [countries that have adopted the U.S. dollar](#). The improvised dollarization, therefore, is dependent on bank notes sent by the six million Venezuelans who fled the country, the laundering of illegal proceeds from drug trafficking and the repatriation of savings from wealthy Venezuelans abroad, said Asdrubal Oliveros, director of Ecoanalitica, an economic research firm in Caracas. That means there is a dire shortage of \$1, \$5 and \$10 bank notes, leaving stores unable to make change.

Still, the dollar flow has helped boost Venezuelan imports. They jumped nearly 33% from January to August 2021 compared with the same period in 2020 and nearly 50% higher compared with the same period in 2019, according to economist Francisco Rodriguez, who tracks trade data from 31 countries that export to Venezuela.

Data from ImportGenius, which monitors port traffic, show Toyota SUVs from Dubai, refrigerators from China and liquor from Panama's free-trade zone flowing into the country throughout the pandemic.

How much further Venezuela's economy will be able to grow largely depends on whether the U.S. loosens the financial and oil-industry sanctions meant to choke off the Maduro regime. It has been widely accused [of graft and human rights abuses](#).

A nearly three-year effort by Juan Guaidó, the opposition politician recognized by the U.S. as Venezuela's rightful leader, failed to oust Mr. Maduro and has left most of the population exhausted from political confrontation, said Luis Vicente Leon, head of the polling firm Datanalisis.

Three out of four Venezuelans want to get rid of Mr. Maduro, but only 4% of people believed that would happen in the near term, according to a Datanalisis poll last month. A third of voters said they planned to cast a ballot in Sunday's elections.

HEADLINE	11/17 China can't censor #MeToo accusation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/world/asia/peng-shuai-zhang-gaoli-china-tennis.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News
GIST	<p>First came the shocking #MeToo accusation by a famous athlete against one of China's top leaders. Then came the accuser's disappearance from public view, one so thorough that questions swirled about her health and personal safety.</p> <p>The authorities in China had hoped the apparatus of a repressive state could simply make the whole thing go away. Instead, an accusation by the tennis player Peng Shuai that she was sexually assaulted by a former vice premier, Zhang Gaoli, continues to confront the political establishment as few things have.</p> <p>The latest pushback on China's effort to squelch the accusation came early on Thursday after Chinese state media tried to refute it, while saying Ms. Peng was safe and sound. It published an email purportedly written by Ms. Peng herself, saying the sexual assault accusations were not true and asking for officials who run women's tennis to stop meddling.</p> <p>The response by the Women's Tennis Association just hours later was unequivocal, suggesting that the email was very likely a crude fraud. "I have a hard time believing that Peng Shuai actually wrote the email we received or believes what is being attributed to her," said Steve Simon, the association's executive director.</p> <p>The international furor over Ms. Peng's accusation has erupted only weeks before a major event on China's calendar — the Winter Olympics in Beijing. The Chinese government now faces a new firestorm of criticism of its behavior, which has added fuel to calls for a diplomatic and commercial boycott of the Games.</p> <p>"The brazen efforts to silence Peng Shuai seem at odds with China's focus on making the Beijing Olympics a success," said Natasha Kassam, the director of public opinion and foreign policy at the Lowy Institute and a former diplomat in Beijing.</p> <p>"There's little doubt that the fake statement will only strengthen calls to boycott the Olympics," she said, adding that the handling of Ms. Peng's accusation "cast even more shadow" on how the International Olympic Committee has responded to allegations that China is committing genocide against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.</p> <p>The committee has long taken a position that sports are separate from the politics of host countries, saying the focus should remain on the athletes and the events. But in China, as in many countries, sports and politics are inextricably intertwined.</p> <p>Ms. Peng's case is the first #MeToo accusation leveled against someone within the highest ranks of power in China, the Politburo Standing Committee. It has highlighted the country's swaggering confidence in its ability to suppress all criticism, including from women who have come forward with accusations of misconduct.</p> <p>"She is definitely not the first one to be forced into silence and disappeared," Lü Ping, an activist who founded the now-banned Chinese online forum Feminist Voices, wrote in a message from New Jersey, where she now lives. "This kind of encounter is absolutely not uncommon in China now. The authorities have too much power and no one can hold them accountable."</p> <p>What has elevated Ms. Peng's case is her celebrity at home. As she skyrocketed through the ranks of professional tennis, she was once held up by the Chinese government as a model athlete. "She is like a breeze in women's tennis," the People's Daily, the main newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party, wrote in 2013. "She'll always be our Chinese princess."</p>

That was shortly after she and her doubles partner, Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan, won the championship at Wimbledon. They won again at the French Open in 2014, the year she [reached the semifinals of the U.S. Open](#) as a singles player and was lauded by officials as a “golden flower” of Chinese sports.

On Nov. 2, her accusation became a thorn in the government’s side.

In a long, at times disjointed post published on her verified social media account that night, Ms. Peng described an on-and-off relationship with Mr. Zhang, a former provincial governor who served as one of seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee between 2012 and 2017. When he stepped down, her post said, they reunited and he assaulted her after inviting her to play tennis with him and his wife.

Ms. Peng, 35, described feeling powerless in making accusations against such a politically powerful man. In the account, which has not been corroborated, Ms. Peng acknowledged that she could not provide evidence.

The accusation reverberated, though, in a society where women are often mistreated. Her description of assault has hit a nerve in China’s nascent #MeToo movement, which has struggled to gain momentum as women who come forward as victims are [frequently met](#) with [heavy-handed](#) legal responses and censorship online.

“Even if it’s just me, like an egg hitting a rock, or a moth to the flame, courting self-destruction, I’ll tell the truth about you,” she wrote. The post disappeared within minutes, but it has continued to circulate in screen shots. Censors have managed to scrub the Chinese internet of any reports or comments about her or the accusation.

State media have not reported on the episode. A spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zhao Lijian, dodged questions about the accusation on Monday, saying, “I have not heard of the issue you raised.” On social media, there are no recent comments about Ms. Peng or her allegations, and posts written by her fans in online forums could not be found.

That silence is in stark contrast to the outpouring of support for Ms. Peng from the international tennis community, a split screen underscoring the effectiveness of China’s censorship tools.

The head of the Women’s Tennis Association has called for an investigation into Ms. Peng’s allegations and even suggested that the tour might stop doing business in China if it did not “see appropriate results.” The governing body of men’s tennis, the ATP Tour, also [weighed in](#) with a statement saying the group was “deeply concerned by the uncertainty surrounding the immediate safety and whereabouts” of Ms. Peng.

Some of the world’s best-known tennis players have also joined in drawing public attention to Ms. Peng — at least outside the reach of China’s censors.

“I can’t believe this is even happening in the 21st century,” Liam Broady, the British tennis player, [wrote](#) of Ms. Peng’s disappearance. Novak Djokovic, the world’s No. 1 men’s player, [said](#) the limited details surrounding Ms. Peng’s disappearance more than two weeks after her post were “shocking.” In calling attention to Ms. Peng’s disappearance, Naomi Osaka of Japan wrote, “Censorship is never OK at any cost.”

The W.T.A.’s response has been far more forceful than other organizations — or even countries — that have found themselves at odds with China’s government. Many have cowered for fear of losing access to the country’s huge markets. In 2019, for example, the National Basketball Association sought to placate the government after Daryl Morey, the general manager of the Houston Rockets, expressed support for the mass protests in Hong Kong, leading to [a blackout](#) of games in China.

Human Rights Watch also [criticized](#) top commercial sponsors of the Olympics last week for not speaking out on issues involving labor and other abuses.

	<p>It remains unclear what the Chinese government will do next, if the calls for information on Ms. Peng's whereabouts grow louder. Ms. Peng remains a ranked player, though she has not competed in a tournament since the Qatar Total Open in February 2020. For now, the government appears to be simply waiting for the scandal to go away.</p> <p>"The party state has reacted as it does to all problems that challenge its moral standing and legitimacy by 'disappearing' the problem itself," said Linda Jaivin, the author of "The Shortest History of China," among other books. "But Peng Shuai, as an internationally prominent figure, is not so easily disappeared."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 NASA: ISS at risk; orbiting debris
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/nasa-space-station-remains-high-risk-shot-satellite-81255247
GIST	<p>CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. -- The International Space Station remains at increased risk from orbiting debris following this week's Russian weapons test, NASA said Thursday.</p> <p>On Monday, Russia launched a missile to destroy a satellite orbiting just above the space station.</p> <p>NASA said late Wednesday that the highest threat to the station and its seven residents was in the first 24 hours. Hatches between many of the station compartments were closed as a precaution, but they were reopened Wednesday.</p> <p>The U.S. Space Command is tracking more than 1,500 satellite fragments, but hundreds of thousands of pieces are too small to see. NASA and the State Department have condemned the missile strike, saying it also puts satellites and China's space station at risk.</p> <p>NASA said it's reviewing an upcoming spacewalk and other station operations, to assess the risks before proceeding. The spacewalk to replace a bad antenna is targeted for Nov. 30. The space agency also plans continued inspections for potential damage.</p> <p>The space station currently is home to four Americans, two Russians and one German.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Spokane police solve 1959 murder case
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/spokane-police-solve-1959-cold-case-murder-of-9-year-old-girl
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Detectives with the Spokane Police Department have solved a decades-old cold case murder.</p> <p>The case stems from the 1959 disappearance of 9-year-old Candy Rogers.</p> <p>The little girl disappeared while selling Camp Fire mints outside of her home. Her body was found in the woods two weeks later, but the case has never been solved, until now.</p> <p>Police intend to share details about the person responsible and how the murder was solved during a news conference on Friday.</p> <p>The case is believed to be one of the oldest cold case murders solved in the state of Washington.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/19 Florida white supremacist prison guards?
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SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-prisons-florida-race-and-ethnicity-racial-injustice-60b96681445509d89e6c0497405497d6
GIST	<p>In June, three Florida prison guards who boasted of being white supremacists beat, pepper sprayed and used a stun gun on an inmate who screamed “I can’t breathe!” at a prison near the Alabama border, according to a fellow inmate who reported it to the state.</p> <p>The next day, the officers at Jackson Correctional Institution did it again to another inmate, the report filed with the Florida Department of Corrections’ Office of Inspector General stated.</p> <p>“If you notice these two incidents were people of color. They (the guards) let it be known they are white supremacist,” the inmate Jamaal Reynolds wrote. “The Black officers and white officers don’t even mingle with each other. Every day they create a hostile environment trying to provoke us so they can have a reason to put their hands on us.”</p> <p>Both incidents occurred in view of surveillance cameras, he said. Reynolds’ neatly printed letter included the exact times and locations and named the officers and inmates. It’s the type of specific information that would have made it easier for officials to determine if the reports were legitimate. But the inspector general’s office did not investigate, corrections spokeswoman Molly Best said. Best did not provide further explanation, and the department hasn’t responded to The Associated Press’ August public records requests for the videos.</p> <p>Some Florida prison guards openly tout associations with white supremacist groups to intimidate inmates and Black colleagues, a persistent practice that often goes unpunished, according to allegations in public documents and interviews with a dozen inmates and current and former employees in the nation’s third-largest prison system.</p> <p>Corrections officials regularly receive reports about guards’ membership in the Ku Klux Klan and criminal gangs, according to former prison inspectors, and current and former officers.</p> <p>Still, few such cases are thoroughly investigated by state prison inspectors; many are downplayed by officers charged with policing their own or discarded as too complicated to pursue.</p> <p>“I’ve visited more than 50 (prison) facilities and have seen that this is a pervasive problem that is not going away,” said Democratic Florida state Rep. Dianne Hart. “It’s partly due to our political climate. But, those who work in our prisons don’t seem to fear people knowing that they’re white supremacists.”</p> <p>The people AP talked to, who live and work inside Florida’s prison system, describe it as chronically understaffed and nearly out of control. In 2017, three current and former Florida guards who were Ku Klux Klan members were convicted after the FBI caught them planning a Black former inmate’s murder.</p> <p>This summer, one guard allowed 20-30 members of a white supremacist inmate group to meet openly inside a Florida prison. A Black officer happened upon the meeting, they told The AP, and later confronted the colleague who allowed it. The officer said their incident report about the meeting went nowhere, and the guard who allowed it was not punished.</p> <p>The officer spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not cleared to discuss official prison business. They told The AP that, after the report went nowhere, they did not feel safe at work and are seeking to leave.</p> <p>—</p> <p>Officers who want to blow the whistle on colleagues are often ostracized and labeled a “snitch,” according to current and former officers.</p> <p>Mark Caruso, a former sergeant with Florida corrections who was twice fired and reinstated after blowing the whistle on fellow officers, described the department as a “good old boy” network.</p>

He said that senior officers-in-charge have the power to censor any allegations of corrupt behavior that occurs on their watch. This keeps reports inside prison walls.

Caruso worked at three prisons in central Florida and reported inmate beatings and officer misconduct multiple times. Being a whistleblower did not work out well for him. He was fired after reporting on a colleague at the first prison where he worked as a sergeant, he said.

He was reinstated after the officers' union challenged the firing, and he moved to a new prison. There, he again reported an officer's use of force and was later fired and reinstated after the union challenged it again.

In 2019, he reported for duty at another new post, the Central Florida Reception Center. He was soon greeted with signs on an employee bulletin board where his name had been crossed out and "SNITCH" scrawled instead, according to testimony at a union grievance hearing. Another officer spit on his car windshield, he said.

Despite the intimidation, Caruso continued reporting inmate abuse and other illegal activity by fellow officers.

"I have reported people when physically seeing them abuse inmates," he testified in another grievance hearing earlier this year. The AP obtained video of the hearing at which multiple officers and leadership testified in detail about the system's reporting structure and culture.

Corrections officers are required to file "incident reports" if they see a co-worker acting inappropriately. In some Florida prisons, supervisors often tell them not to email the reports, according to officers who testified at Caruso's hearing. Instead, they're told to tell their supervisor verbally what happened or write it longhand. A superior officer then types it up, choosing the language and framing the event.

A sergeant testified that the reason he typed up his officers' incident reports was because most struggle with writing. Also, most do not have computer access at the prison.

Caruso said he refused to report incidents of corruption verbally because it left no record, and he worried that prison leadership would censor his reports. So he emailed them to create an electronic record, a decision that, he says, irked prison leadership.

After seeing his reports go nowhere, he finally went over his superior officers' heads. Caruso made contact with an investigator in the Office of Inspector General and emailed Florida Corrections Secretary Mark Inch directly. Inch responded to him expressing concern, Caruso said, and referred the matter to the IG's office. That did not end well, either.

"For at least two years I reported to (the IG's office) all of the corruption I saw. He didn't respond or follow up," Caruso said of the inspector general's investigator.

Caruso was eventually fired again after officials said he'd failed to report an inmate beating — one Caruso said he did not actually witness. It was a baffling charge given his active campaign of reporting others throughout his corrections career. He claimed, unsuccessfully this time, that the firing was retaliation.

If the inspector general were motivated to aggressively investigate reports of abuse by white supremacists or other gang members working as correctional officers he would face barriers, the former investigators told AP.

That's because state law limits the use of inmates as confidential informants, they said, and guards are reluctant or afraid to snitch on their colleagues.

For an inmate to act as an informant, the FBI would have to take over the case because Florida law limits the inspector general's office's interactions with inmates, the former investigators said. "We don't have the authority to do anything," one said.

Officers, meantime, fear retaliation.

"Officers are saying their colleagues are members, but they can have me killed," one former investigator said.

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After the three guards in Florida were captured on FBI recordings plotting a Black inmate's murder upon his release, Florida corrections spokeswoman Michelle Glady insisted there was no indication of a wider problem of white supremacists working in the prisons, so the state would not investigate further.

After the statement, an AP reporter in April visited the employee parking lot of one facility in the state's rural north and photographed cars and trucks adorned with symbols and stickers that are often associated with the white supremacist movement: Confederate flags, Q-Anon and Thin Blue Line images.

Florida has grappled with this issue for decades. In the early 2000s, the corrections department was forced by a St. Petersburg Times expose to investigate a clique of racist guards who all carried rope keychains with a noose. The Times reported that the noose keychains were used to signal a racist officer who was willing to inflict pain, particularly on Black inmates.

The state investigated the keychains and complaints from Black guards of workplace discrimination. Department inspectors interviewed the white guards who were known to carry the noose keychains and eventually cleared them all.

"This is a pattern all over the country," said Paul Wright, a former inmate who co-founded the prisoner-rights publication Prison Legal News. Wright helped expose Ku Klux Klan members working in a Washington state prison in the 1990s. He and Prison Legal News have since reported cases of Nazis and klan members working as correctional officers in California, New York, Texas, Illinois and many other states.

"There's an institutional acceptance of this type of racism," Wright said. "What's striking about this is that so many of them keep their jobs."

Most state prisons and police departments throughout the U.S. do very little background checking to see if new hires have extremist views, said Greg Ehrie, former chief of the FBI's New York domestic terrorism squad, who now works with the Anti-Defamation League.

"There are 513 police agencies in New Jersey, and not one bans being part of outlaw motorcycle gangs. A prison guard who is the patched member of the Pagans, he can be out about it and tell you about it (with no punishment) because it's not stipulated in the employment contract," Ehrie said. The ADL lists the Pagans among biker gangs with white supremacist group affiliations.

This dynamic can lead to what the former Florida prison investigator described as "criminals watching over criminals."

"If you have a heartbeat, a GED and no felony conviction you can get a job. That's sad," said Caruso, the former Florida correctional sergeant.

Florida state Rep. Hart and Caruso have called for a thorough investigation of the issue and a federal takeover of the prison system.

The FBI said it would neither confirm nor deny if such an investigation had been launched, but Ehrie said it is likely.

“I would be extremely surprised if this wasn’t an open bureau investigation,” he said of Florida’s prison system. “It’s almost impossible that they’re not investigating.”

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Meanwhile, reports of racist behavior by correctional officers continue, according to inmates and current and former Florida corrections employees.

In late September, at another Panhandle prison, a 25-year-old Black inmate reported being beaten by a white officer who said “You’re lucky I didn’t have my spray on me, cuz I would gas yo Black ass.” The inmate’s lip was split open and his face swollen.

The inmate’s family requested anonymity for fear of retaliation.

His mother reported the incident to the Inspector General’s office on Oct. 1 and requested a wellness check on him. The office sent an investigator to the facility to interview her son, according to emails provided by the family.

After the interview, the IG refused to investigate the officer’s conduct. The mother was told it was her son’s word versus the officer’s, and there was nothing they could do. The IG’s office referred the matter instead to the prison warden.

The officer continued working in the inmate’s dorm and threatened him, the inmate said in letters home.

“All them is a click (sic), a gang. Ya feel me, they all work together,” the inmate wrote in October. For weeks, he sent desperate letters saying he was still being terrorized. He urged his mother to continue fighting.

“Don’t let up Mom. This has extremely messed up my mental. Got me shell shock, feel less of a man, violated ya feel me? But I love you.”

She eventually helped him get transferred in early November to a facility with a reputation for being even more lawless and brutal, according to the family and a current officer. He is four years into a 12-year sentence for attempted robbery with a gun or deadly weapon.

“I do look forward to seeing my son one day and I can only pray,” the mother told AP. “I’m overwhelmed, tired and doing my best to hold on for my son’s sake.”

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HEADLINE	11/18 Trial: secret slang white supremacists
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/11/18/charlottesville-jury-slang-white-supremacists/
GIST	<p>CHARLOTTESVILLE — The jury in a federal courtroom listened as a longtime researcher of far-right movements parsed the style guide of the infamous neo-Nazi website the Daily Stormer.</p> <p>“The tone of the site should be light. Most people are not comfortable with material that comes across as vitriolic, raging, nonironic hatred. The unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not,” according to a guide section titled “Lulz” — which stands for “laugh out loud.” Continuing with a derogatory term for Jews, it read, “This is obviously a ploy and I actually do want to gas k---s. But that’s neither here nor there.”</p> <p>This evidence, introduced in an ongoing civil trial against organizers of the deadly 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, appeared to highlight a sinister strategy expert witness Pete Simi was trying to teach the jurors: the ways in which white supremacists employ humor to shield their calls for violence, in an effort to render them legally ambiguous.</p>

As jurors consider the plaintiffs' accusation that the rally organizers conspired to foment racial violence, they have been presented with a trove of evidence that includes messages laced with slurs, memes of using cars to run over protesters and calls for cracking skulls. Over the past four weeks, plaintiffs' attorneys have tried to make their case by carefully breaking down the jokes and catchphrases favored by far-right extremists, in an effort to teach jurors how to decode white supremacists' secret vocabulary of hate.

Whether the jury takes this evidence literally or views it as exaggeration is the crux of many arguments in this trial.

The plaintiffs' attorneys have called in experts to help the jury understand what is sinister about the numbers 1488 — which refer to “14 words,” a popular white supremacist slogan, and “Heil Hitler,” because “H” is the eighth letter of the alphabet. They have translated the phrase “RaHoWa,” which may sound like gibberish to outsiders but among hate groups stands for “racial holy war.” And they explained how a question that seems innocuous — “Did you see Kyle?” — is actually a play on words for the Nazi salute “Sieg Heil.”

White supremacist movements use “lots of insider language and codes and specific references that would require kind of an insider's knowledge,” Simi said in the courtroom. “They can talk about violence, they can advocate for violence, and then say, ‘Well, it was just a joke.’ ”

Deborah Lipstadt, a renowned Holocaust scholar, testified about the ways antisemitism is a bedrock of white supremacist ideology and one that was featured during the Unite the Right rally weekend, notably at the Friday-night torch march where a mob chanted, “Jews will not replace us!”

She said the ideology behind these chants comes from the “Great Replacement Theory,” the conspiratorial idea of an engineered demographic replacement of White Christians that is frequently repeated by right-wing pundits such as Fox News's Tucker Carlson. In her testimony, Lipstadt called the chants at the torch march “a call to battle.”

Heidi Beirich — a co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism and former director of intelligence at the Southern Poverty Law Center — said the subculture of extremism on display in this trial illustrates how the brazen racism seen on the streets of Charlottesville four years ago emboldened and radicalized racists across the country, including those who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6.

“It shows you how much the online world has pervaded the offline world,” Beirich, who has been following the trial, said in an interview with The Washington Post. “The fact is, I wish more Americans knew what the jurors are hearing right now.”

Attorneys for the plaintiffs — nine people who allege physical harm and emotional distress that weekend — and defendants are expected to begin their closing arguments Thursday.

The lawsuit backed by Integrity First for America, a civil rights nonprofit organization, is underpinned by a more-than-150-year-old statute designed to protect newly emancipated Black people from the Ku Klux Klan.

Throughout this trial, defendants have argued they were exercising their First Amendment rights in Charlottesville. Inside the courtroom, they have used the n-word, repeated slurs for Jewish people and openly praised Adolf Hitler.

And they have dismissed calls for violence as hyperbolic jokes. Jason Kessler, a defendant and lead organizer of the Unite the Right rally, testified that many of the messages presented in court were simply “s---posting,” or posting something provocative to get a rise out of someone. Defendants blamed the mayhem of that weekend on counterprotesters they labeled “antifa,” or antifascists, and police inaction.

Experts and attorneys for the plaintiffs say this deflection is part of a playbook to avoid accountability.

“Plausible deniability, just like mace and shields and flagpoles, was a tool of this conspiracy,” plaintiffs’ attorney Karen Dunn said in court. “Plausible deniability is when you set up a situation in such a way that you can claim later that you had nothing to do with it.”

Violence cloaked in humor

In the courtroom, plaintiffs’ attorneys played a podcast recording with the voice of defendant Christopher Cantwell, who became widely known as the “crying Nazi” following an emotional video posted when a warrant was issued for his arrest.

It was an episode from Aug. 7, 2017, days before Cantwell joined hundreds of white supremacists in Charlottesville for a rally that turned deadly when a neo-Nazi sped his car into a crowd of counterprotesters, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. James A. Fields Jr., who was sentenced to life in prison for the car-ramming, is also a defendant in this civil suit.

“I’m not even a Hitler-ite, but I’m like ‘Okay, let’s f-----g gas the k---s and have a race war,’” Cantwell said. He then laughed.

“Can you explain, Professor, what’s going on in that clip?” plaintiffs’ attorney Roberta Kaplan asked Simi.

Simi pointed to the eerie juxtaposition of Cantwell’s laughter after his call for mass murder: “I can’t tell you how many times over the last 25 years I’ve seen similar instances where violent references, violent rhetoric is ... cloaked with some reference to humor.”

Cantwell has pleaded guilty in a separate case to two counts of assault and battery stemming from his use of pepper spray during the Unite the Right rally weekend. He is also serving a 41-month federal prison sentence after being convicted of extortion and threat charges.

Samantha Froelich, whose testimony was played in a deposition video by the plaintiffs’ attorneys, joined the far-right group Identity Evropa for about a year to appease her boyfriend. She explained how during that time, she often saw extreme concepts disguised as jokes to make them more palatable — and as a way to have plausible deniability.

“They’ll say that it’s just edgy humor, but it’s really just a way to push the envelope and say as heinous of things or as extreme ideas as they can and get away with it,” Froelich said. “If someone were to call you out on it and say, ‘Hey, that’s really disgusting ideology,’ you could say, ‘It’s just a joke. We don’t mean it.’”

‘Wolves in sheep’s clothing’

The jurors have seen two versions of Richard Spencer in court — the white supremacist spewing a racist tirade after the Unite the Right rally in a secretly recorded audio clip and the suit-and-tie-wearing defendant who claims his beliefs are simply “controversial.”

“What they say and do privately behind closed doors is going to tell us a lot about their true motives and plans in this case,” Dunn, one of the plaintiffs’ attorneys, told the jurors.

Simi and fellow sociologist Kathleen Blee worked with the plaintiffs to review defendants’ messages and concluded that they utilized a common white supremacist movement tactic, including this “front stage” and “backstage” behavior, “doublespeak” and a “new-age communication platform.”

The Unite the Right rally organizers’ and attendees’ planning messages presented in court come from a leaked trove from the group-chat platform Discord and other communications.

	<p>During his testimony, Simi read an email between Kessler and Jeff Schoep, the former leader of the National Socialist Movement, which at one time was the largest neo-Nazi group in the country.</p> <p>“The number one thing that you guys can do is show up in plain clothes without flags or ‘white supremacist’ symbols ready to participate in and protect our event. There will be a thousand or more antifa and s---libs eager to start violence.”</p> <p>Schoep replied: “So just keep in mind that we have ceased use of the swastika as of November 2016 so you will see swastikas in some of the videos which were filmed below before.”</p> <p>Simi said this was a straightforward example of that “front stage, backstage” behavior: The National Socialist Movement stopped using a swastika as their symbol — not because they disavowed it, Simi testified, but because of the optics.</p> <p>Defendants and their followers also spoke about ways to instigate fights with their enemies in Charlottesville in a way that would allow them to claim self-defense, according to evidence presented by the plaintiffs’ attorneys.</p> <p>Froelich also testified to this, explaining how during her time with Identity Evropa, optics “were paramount.”</p> <p>Her boyfriend, who worked at an exterminator company, shared with her how he wished he was killing Jewish people instead of cockroaches.</p> <p>In public, Identity Evropa members had strict instructions to “speak with eloquence” and avoid racial slurs and Nazi references, Froelich testified in a deposition.</p> <p>She was told to wear dresses, look feminine and avoid unnatural hair colors.</p> <p>“They wanted to be presentable,” Froelich said. “It was like being wolves in sheep’s clothing.”</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Israel minister housekeeper arrest: spying
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/israel-defence-ministers-housekeeper-charged-with-spying
GIST	<p>Israel has charged the housekeeper for the country’s defence minister with espionage for offering to spy for hackers reportedly linked to Iran.</p> <p>The man, identified as Omri Goren, reportedly has a criminal record but worked at Benny Gantz’s home as a cleaner and caretaker.</p> <p>His arrest raised questions about the thoroughness of background checks of people with access to Israel’s leaders. The Shin Bet security service, which announced the arrest, said it was reviewing its vetting procedures.</p> <p>According to the security service and the indictment, Goren saw reports in the Israeli media about a hacker group called “Black Shadow”. He looked up the group and used the Telegram app to contact one of its agents, presenting himself as someone who worked for Gantz. Goren demonstrated his access to the defence minister by sending photographs of various items in Gantz’s home, including his computer.</p> <p>The government said Goren, also identified in the indictment under the name Gorochovsky, discussed infecting Gantz’s computer with malware but was arrested before any plans were carried out. He had no access to classified material, it said.</p> <p>Israeli media reported that Goren has been jailed four times, including for armed robbery and breaking into homes. According to the reports, he did not undergo a security review before working for Gantz.</p>

	<p>Goren's public defender, Gal Wolf, was quoted in news reports as saying the suspect was desperate for money and had no intention of damaging national security.</p> <p>According to Israeli media, "Black Shadow" has been linked to Iran and is responsible for a series of hacking attacks on widely used websites.</p> <p>"There is concern about the entire security screening system in the State of Israel, which is funded by tens of millions of shekels from taxpayers every year," tweeted Barak Ravid, diplomatic correspondent for Walla news. "The Iranians must be bursting with laughter."</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 FBI continues search for Jimmy Hoffa
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/18/nyregion/jimmy-hoffa-fbi-investigation.html
GIST	<p>The disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa, a mystery that has gripped the American imagination for half a century on its ascent to national folklore, is the subject of a new F.B.I. investigation centered on the site of a former landfill in Jersey City. A worker, on his deathbed, said he buried the body underground in a steel drum.</p> <p>F.B.I. agents armed with a search warrant arrived in Jersey City at a plot of dirt and gravel the size of a Little League diamond below the Pulaski Skyway on Oct. 25 and 26 to conduct a "site survey," according to the Detroit field office, which has led the investigation into Mr. Hoffa's disappearance in 1975. The steel drum is said to be buried about 15 feet below ground, in the shadow of countless millions of drivers who have passed it by.</p> <p>"F.B.I. personnel from the Newark and Detroit field offices completed the survey and that data is currently being analyzed," Special Agent Mara R. Schneider, a spokeswoman, said on Thursday. The formal statement did not mention Mr. Hoffa by name and did not elaborate on a timeline for any potential excavation.</p> <p>The new investigation, to be sure, has a familiar ring, as it follows several failed searches for Mr. Hoffa's body over the years. In Michigan, where Mr. Hoffa was last seen outside a restaurant, officers with backhoes have searched various locations, including a farm, a driveway and beneath a swimming pool.</p> <p>In New Jersey, a popular urban legend had Mr. Hoffa's remains buried under the old Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands. The 2019 film "The Irishman" raised yet another version of what may have happened, portraying Mr. Hoffa's character shot and killed by his friend, Frank Sheeran, and his body incinerated. That theory, advanced by Mr. Sheeran in a book before his death, has long been discounted by Hoffa scholars as unlikely.</p> <p>But an expert on the Hoffa case who brought the disclosure of the steel drum and its possible location to the F.B.I., Dan Moldea, a journalist who has written about the Teamster boss since before he disappeared, said the New Jersey site is "100 percent" credible, and that the new leads were very significant.</p> <p>"A very prominent person disappeared from a public place 46 years ago and was never seen again," Mr. Moldea said Thursday. "This case has to be solved."</p> <p>The new lead is bolstered by records showing that the F.B.I. received tips as far back as 1975, immediately following his disappearance, that Mr. Hoffa was buried in the landfill in Jersey City. Agents searched and, finding nothing, wrote off the tips.</p> <p>The story of how the F.B.I. came to learn of the new location begins on a muddy summer day in 1975. A teenage boy named Frank Cappola worked at the former PJP Landfill near the Skyway with his father, Paul Cappola Sr.</p>

“While I was talking to my dad, a black limousine drove into our lot in the mud,” Frank Cappola recalled many years later, in 2019, at age 62, in a sworn written statement before a notary public. His father turned to a partner at the landfill and said, “They’re here.”

The boy watched from a distance as the men approached the vehicle, where they spoke to the visitors and seemed to point to a remote corner of the landfill. He would later learn what was being planned.

By that summer of 1975, Jimmy Hoffa, who once commanded the powerful Teamsters union, had fallen from the heights of power. He served a sentence in prison after being convicted of jury tampering in 1964, and his attempts to return to his union throne upon his release were not welcomed.

At the same time, a longtime friendship with the New Jersey Mafia boss Anthony Provenzano — “Tony Pro” — had soured badly. Men who operated in the pair’s orbit would later say that it was practically an open secret that Mr. Hoffa’s days were numbered.

On July 30, 1975, Mr. Hoffa was in Bloomfield Township, Mich., for a meeting to address this very situation. He was to sit down with Mr. Provenzano and another mobster at the Machus Red Fox, a popular restaurant. But when he arrived, the other two men were not there.

And with that, Jimmy Hoffa disappeared.

The F.B.I. combed the restaurant’s credit-card receipts to track down potential witnesses from that day. A few said they saw Mr. Hoffa that afternoon out in front, where he got into the back seat of a car that drove away.

Agents interrogated union leaders and Mob bosses and henchmen, pulling dozens of them in front of grand juries. One possible outcome of Mr. Hoffa’s disappearance emerged among many, with the seemingly unlikely destination hundreds of miles away — a New Jersey landfill. The 87-acre landfill was owned in part by a man named Phil Moscato and was commonly referred to as “Brother Moscato’s dump.”

A Teamster who was in prison in New Jersey on an unrelated murder conviction, Ralph Picardo, became an informant and told the F.B.I. in 1975 that Mr. Provenzano told him as early as 1974 that Mr. Hoffa “was destined to be killed,” according to F.B.I. documents.

Shortly after Mr. Hoffa disappeared, associates of Mr. Provenzano visited Mr. Picardo in prison, and during their conversation, said Mr. Provenzano had arranged for Mr. Hoffa’s execution and that the body was taken to New Jersey on a truck.

“Picardo only speculates that Hoffa’s body may be in Moscato dump in New Jersey,” the F.B.I. wrote in a report in 1979, “and has no direct knowledge of the exact location.” Mr. Provenzano died in 1988.

A second informant in Philadelphia said two mobsters brought up the disappearance in a conversation. One said, “If the feds begin digging at the proposed dump in New Jersey, they would hit pay dirt,” and the other replied, “Yes, they sure will,” according to the report.

F.B.I. agents visited the dump in 1975 with a search warrant in a different missing person’s case, but in reality, they hoped to find Mr. Hoffa. They performed a cursory search, not knowing where to dig, and found nothing.

The dump itself became a toxic hazard. Underground fires burned night and day, spewing chemical fumes in the poor neighborhoods surrounding the site. In 1983, the dump, by then called PJP Landfill, was declared a Superfund site, an environmental disaster area to be cleaned up.

Thousands of barrels were dug up and carted away, and the landfill was capped. In recent years, it was converted into the Skyway Park, a vibrant green belt along the Hackensack River.

Mr. Moldea continued to revisit the Hoffa case over the years. In 2019, when “The Irishman” opened to theater audiences and on Netflix, he praised the film’s engaging storytelling while calling out its climactic killing as untrue.

It was around that time that Mr. Moldea was introduced to a stranger named Frank Cappola, the teenager from the landfill, with a story to tell about his father.

He recalled that muddy summer day in 1975, with the black limousine and the conversation between his father, Mr. Moscato, the partner, and the visitors. When people began gesturing to an area in the dump, Frank Cappola saw his father, Paul, react in anger: “Now the whole world will know!” he shouted with an expletive.

Frank didn’t know what he was talking about for years. Then, in 2008, nearing death, his father summoned him to tell his tale, which he had shared with no one. He encouraged his son to reveal it when the time seemed right.

The men in the limousine had come to instruct the men in the dump that Mr. Hoffa’s body was being delivered shortly and that they were to bury it, Paul Cappola told his son. Mr. Moscato told him to do the job himself.

“My father was upset with Mr. Moscato for pointing to that area of the landfill,” Frank Cappola wrote in a sworn statement in 2019, “because the dump was constantly under police scrutiny.”

“Unidentified people brought Hoffa’s dead body to PJP,” Frank Cappola wrote. “Because of the awkward position of Hoffa’s corpse after they removed him from whatever container he was in before, they were unable to place him, feet first, in a 55-gallon steel drum retrieved at PJP. So, they put him in the drum headfirst.”

Paul Cappola was left alone with the body in the barrel, and worried that someone may have seen the men pointing earlier. He made a change in plans.

“My father, who didn’t trust anybody, decided to dig a second hole with a company excavator and to place Hoffa in that location,” Frank Cappola wrote.

The new hole was on a desolate patch of unused state property just outside the dump, between eight and 15 feet deep, the father told his son. He buried the Hoffa barrel first, followed by as many as 15 to 30 chemical drums and chunks of brick and dirt, he told his son.

Then he covered the whole area with dirt. He “placed something detectable just under the surface of the grave site, which I am willing to disclose to law enforcement,” Frank Cappola wrote. Paul Cappola told his son he never shared the location with his partner or anyone else.

In March 2020, Frank Cappola died after longtime respiratory problems. He left his father’s secret with Mr. Moldea, who wrote about the disclosure. The F.B.I. contacted him in 2020, he said. He visited the site with a Fox News crew and ground penetrating radar equipment in November 2020. The radar detected shapes that resembled barrels, he said.

The site is adjacent to what is now Interstate Waste Services, a trash collection company that for years has stored empty metal containers under the Skyway. In late October, workers were abruptly ordered to clear them out, Isaac Suarez, 19, an employee, said last week. He saw the investigators arrive.

“They scanned the floor and found barrels,” Mr. Suarez said at the site, adding the location made sense. “If you were trying to hide somebody you killed, wouldn’t you want it to be in plain sight, but not?”

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/us/julius-jones-oklahoma-clemency.html
GIST	<p>Gov. Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma called off the execution of a death-row inmate just hours before the man was scheduled to die by lethal injection on Thursday, culminating an extraordinary campaign for clemency that drew in celebrities, his fellow conservatives and Christian leaders.</p> <p>Mr. Stitt, a Republican and death-penalty supporter, announced that, after “prayerful consideration,” he had reduced the death sentence for the inmate, Julius Jones, 41, who was convicted of first-degree murder in 2002, to life in prison without the possibility of parole.</p> <p>Mr. Jones and his supporters insisted he was not guilty, and a state board voted twice to recommend that he be made eligible for parole.</p> <p>The case had become a flashpoint in the broader debate over the death penalty. Mr. Jones was scheduled to be executed less than a month after another death-row inmate in Oklahoma, John Marion Grant, vomited and shook for several minutes as he died by lethal injection on Oct. 28.</p> <p>That execution, the state’s first since a halt was called in 2015, fueled criticism that its methods amounted to unconstitutional cruelty. Mr. Grant was put to death a few hours after the U.S. Supreme Court, with its three more liberal members dissenting, lifted a stay of execution for both men.</p> <p>The governor was under mounting pressure to commute Mr. Jones’s sentence from prominent figures who went beyond liberal critics of the death penalty. Those figures included Matt Schlapp, the chairman of the American Conservative Union; Timothy Head, the executive director of the Faith & Freedom Coalition; and several Republican state lawmakers.</p> <p>Kelly Masters, a prominent Oklahoma lawyer and agent for N.F.L. players, who got involved in Mr. Jones’s case last year, said she realized that the best way to influence Mr. Stitt was to reach out to conservative figures in Oklahoma and beyond.</p> <p>“I became convinced we were about to execute an innocent man,” said Ms. Masters, who has served as an unpaid adviser for Mr. Jones’s defense team. “I knew we had to bring conservative voices into the discussion and I knew that the faith community needed to weigh in.”</p> <p>She got in touch with the Faith & Freedom Coalition, the conservative advocacy group founded by Ralph Reed. Ms. Masters also met with conservative lawmakers in Oklahoma who voiced their concerns. And she took part in a private meeting with Mr. Stitt this month in which she went through details of the case.</p> <p>Still, Ms. Masters, like other supporters of Mr. Jones, expressed surprise at the 11th-hour decision.</p> <p>“After prayerful consideration and reviewing materials presented by all sides of this case, I have determined to commute Julius Jones’s sentence to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole,” Mr. Stitt said in a statement that offered no further details of his thinking on the matter.</p> <p>In September and again this month, the state’s Pardon and Parole Board recommended that Mr. Jones’s sentence be commuted to life in prison with the possibility of parole, giving Mr. Stitt final say over Mr. Jones’s fate.</p> <p>This week, hundreds of students across the state walked out of schools to protest Mr. Jones’s execution. Hundreds of people also demonstrated in support of Mr. Jones in the State Capitol and outside the governor’s mansion and the Oklahoma State Penitentiary. Many chanted, prayed and sang, and then erupted in cheers and applause when the news spread.</p> <p>Mr. Jones’s case had been featured in a 2018 documentary series produced by Viola Davis, a podcast episode last year featuring Kim Kardashian West and a recent episode of “The Late Late Show With James Corden.” Baker Mayfield, a quarterback for the Cleveland Browns, who won the 2017 Heisman</p>

[Trophy](#) as a player for the University of Oklahoma, had also urged Mr. Stitt to reduce Mr. Jones's sentence.

In a statement, Amanda Bass, a lawyer for Mr. Jones, said that Mr. Stitt's decision would restore "public faith in the criminal justice system."

While the legal team had hoped the governor would leave open the possibility of parole, she said, "we are grateful that the governor has prevented an irreparable mistake."

Not everyone was happy with the decision, though Oklahoma's attorney general, John O'Connor, said he appreciated the condition that Mr. Jones never be released from prison.

"We are greatly disappointed that after 22 years, four appeals, including the review of 13 appellate judges, the work of the investigators, prosecutors, jurors and the trial judge have been set aside," Mr. O'Connor, a Republican, said in [a statement](#). "A thorough review of the evidence confirms Julius Jones's guilt in this case and that the death penalty was warranted."

Mr. Jones had been found guilty of killing Paul Howell, who was in a car in the driveway of his parents' home when he was carjacked and fatally shot in 1999. A former high school basketball player from Oklahoma City, Mr. Jones was 19 at the time. Mr. Howell, a businessman from the suburb of Edmond, was 45.

Relatives of Mr. Howell, a white man whose sister and two daughters witnessed his killing, have said that the campaign to grant clemency to Mr. Jones had [caused them pain](#). They could not be immediately reached for comment on Thursday.

"Our family continues to be victimized by Julius Jones and his lies," Mr. Howell's brother, Brian Howell, said at a news conference in September.

Advocates for Mr. Jones have argued that his defense lawyers failed him during his trial — for instance, by neglecting to question family members who said that he was having dinner with them at the time of Mr. Howell's killing — and that prosecutors relied too heavily on the testimony of a co-defendant who said that he had seen Mr. Jones commit the crime.

"I did not kill Mr. Howell," Mr. Jones wrote to the parole board in April, after he had exhausted his appeals. "I did not participate in any way in his murder; and the first time I saw him was on television when his death was reported."

Supporters of Mr. Jones, who is Black, also argued that racism played a role in his trial and sentencing. African Americans make up [a disproportionate number of death-row prisoners](#) in Oklahoma and in the United States, and [research has shown](#) that people convicted of murder are much more likely to be executed if the person who was killed was white.

The federal government and 27 states have some form of capital punishment. Executions peaked at 98 in 1999, and 10 people have been put to death this year, [according to the Death Penalty Information Center](#). Of the 2,504 people on death row in April, 42 percent were white, 41 percent were Black and 13 percent were Hispanic, the center said.

Mr. Stitt's announcement came after federal public defenders filed an emergency motion on Thursday asking a federal judge to stay the execution based on "compelling evidence" that the drugs used in lethal injections "pose a serious and substantial risk of severe suffering and pain to prisoners."

The lawyers urged the court to ensure that Mr. Jones and three other death-row inmates not be executed before February, when a federal trial is set to begin in a long-running lawsuit over whether the drugs used in executions subject inmates to unconstitutional pain and suffering.

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HEADLINE	11/18 Ex-professor charged: setting CA wildfires
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/college-professor-charged-setting-california-fires-81264091
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO -- A former college professor was indicted by a federal grand jury Thursday for allegedly starting four wildfires in Northern California earlier this year that threatened to trap firefighters as they battled a massive fire nearby, federal prosecutors said.</p> <p>Gary Stephen Maynard, 47, faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count of arson to federal property, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of California said in a statement.</p> <p>According to court documents, Maynard’s alleged arson spree included blazes he started in July and August behind crews fighting the Dixie Fire, which became the second biggest wildfire in California history, scorching more than 1,500 square miles (3,900 square kilometers) and destroying more than 1,000 structures.</p> <p>Federal prosecutors say Maynard, a resident of San Jose, set four blazes: the Cascade and Everitt fires, on July 20 and 21, and the Ranch and Conard Fires on Aug. 7.</p> <p>U.S. Forest Service agents started investigating Maynard on July 20 after the Cascade Fire was reported on the western slopes of Mount Shasta.</p> <p>An investigator found Maynard underneath his black Kia Soul that had its front wheels stuck in a ditch and its undercarriage centered on a boulder, court papers said.</p> <p>A second fire erupted the next day on Mount Shasta, and investigators later found tire tracks similar to those made by the Kia.</p> <p>They eventually placed a tracking device under Maynard’s car after he was stopped briefly by police on Aug. 3. Tracking his movements for hundreds of miles, investigators said Maynard traveled to the area where the Ranch and Conard Fires erupted in the Lassen National Forest.</p>

	<p>“It appeared that Maynard was in the midst of an arson-setting spree,” court papers said.</p> <p>Maynard has denied setting the fires, court papers say. It wasn’t immediately known whether he has an attorney who can speak on his behalf.</p> <p>Maynard appears to have taught briefly at Santa Clara University and Sonoma State University, where a Gary Maynard was listed as a lecturer in criminal justice studies specializing in criminal justice, cults and deviant behavior. He is no longer with either school.</p> <p>Maynard is in custody pending trial, the U.S. Attorney’s Office said.</p> <p>Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Anderson wrote in an August detention memo that Maynard had entered the evacuation zone and “began setting fires behind the first responders fighting the Dixie Fire.”</p> <p>In addition to the danger of enlarging the Dixie Fire and threatening more lives and property, “this increased the danger to the first responders,” Anderson said.</p>
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HEADLINE	11/18 Maryland: search, traffic stop then 4 dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-officers-wanted-carjacking-kidnapping-chief-urges-surrender/story?id=81255246
GIST	<p>Four people were pronounced dead following an attempted traffic stop in Maryland, as a manhunt was underway in the state for two former police officers who were considered armed and dangerous. On Thursday night, police confirmed two of the deceased were the former officers.</p> <p>Three passengers were pronounced dead at the scene in Smithsburg late Thursday afternoon, including a female driver, an adult man and one child, according to Maryland State Police.</p> <p>A fourth passenger, another child, was medevacked to a local hospital and pronounced dead, police said.</p> <p>All four appeared to have been shot, Elena Russo, a spokesperson for Maryland State Police, said during a press briefing. The car had run off the road and hit a fence line, she said.</p> <p>Maryland State Police said in a statement later Thursday that they were able to identify the deceased individuals.</p> <p>The woman in the front seat of the car was Tia Bynum, 35, a former Baltimore County police officer. She was pronounced dead on the scene by emergency medical service personnel. "Bynum was wanted by the Baltimore County Police Department and considered armed and dangerous," they said. The man in the back seat was identified as Robert Vicoso, 41, also a former police officer. He was also pronounced dead on the scene and was previously wanted for committing multiple felony crimes in Pennsylvania and Maryland.</p> <p>"Police believe the two juveniles located in the back seat were Vicoso’s children," the police department said. One was pronounced dead at the scene and the other was transported by police to Meritus Medical Center in Hagerstown, where she was also pronounced dead.</p> <p>Both adults and both children have been transported to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Baltimore for autopsy, police said.</p> <p>"This is a complex incident. It is going to take time," Russo said. "We are really working hard to understand what occurred."</p> <p>Russo would not confirm Thursday afternoon if the deadly incident was related to the manhunt for former Baltimore County police officers Vicoso and Bynum, who were being sought for an alleged kidnapping</p>

and armed robbery that occurred Wednesday in Baltimore County, Maryland. Vicoso has also been accused of stealing a car in York County, Pennsylvania, and fleeing with his two young daughters earlier this week.

Russo did say that investigators believe the Smithsburg incident is potentially related to two incidents in Maryland and Pennsylvania

"The Pennsylvania State Police were attempting a traffic stop on a car that matched the description of a suspect vehicle involved in an incident in Baltimore County," Russo said.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan appeared to reference the incident in a statement on Twitter Thursday night, calling it a "horrific tragedy."

"We are grieving tonight over the unfathomable loss of two innocent children in what is clearly a horrific tragedy and heinous crime," he said. "Maryland State Police have begun what will be a thorough investigation into today's events."

Authorities began searching for Vicoso after he allegedly held a woman at gunpoint at a home in York County, stole her car and fled with his two daughters, ages 6 and 7, police in York County said. The stolen car was found in Red Lion, Pennsylvania, police said.

On Wednesday afternoon, Vicoso and Bynum allegedly committed a kidnapping and robbery in the Cockeysville, Maryland, area, the Baltimore County Police Department said.

Vicoso was allegedly armed with a semi-automatic handgun, police said, adding that his daughters were present during the robbery.

The suspects allegedly carjacked a man and forced him to drive them, before releasing the victim unharmed, Baltimore County Police Chief Melissa Hyatt said.

Baltimore County police said Vicoso was fired in August for several disciplinary violations, according to records obtained by Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, ABC affiliate WHTM. Police said Bynum, who was in the criminal investigations bureau, is currently suspended and stripped of police powers.

Vicoso and Bynum were believed to have been "armed with at least one handgun and possibly several semi-automatic rifles," police said in a public alert Thursday morning.

Hyatt began her remarks at a news conference Thursday morning with a personal plea to Bynum.

"Our priority is the safety and well-being of [Vicoso's daughters] Giana and Aaminah. Please get these two innocent and precious children to a safe location," Hyatt said. "We want to work with you on a safe and peaceful resolution."

She urged both suspects to "peacefully surrender to authorities."

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